

WILD WEST



A MAGAZINE CONTAINING STORIES, SKETCHES Etc. OF WESTERN LIFE.

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No. 39.

NEW YORK, JULY 17, 1903.

Price 5 Cents.

YOUNG WILD WEST'S ROUGH RIDERS; OR, THE ROSE BUD OF THE ROCKIES.

By AN OLD SCOUT



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CHAPTER I.

HARRIE EUGENE LANCASTER, TENDERFOOT

As the 6.35 train came to a stop at the depot in the hustling mining town of Weston one summer evening a few years ago a tall young man wearing a suit of tailor-made clothes and a broad-brimmed, pearl-colored felt hat alighted and stood on the platform as though undecided as to which way to turn.

A single glance at him would be apt to impress the ordinary Westerner that he was a tenderfoot, and also that he had plenty of money at his command.

His clothing was made of costly material and the heavy gold chain and big diamond that he sported was evidence of this.

The young man stood on the platform, satchel in hand, until the conductor left the train and started up the platform.

"I beg your pardon, conductor," he observed, stepping forward and touching him on the arm, "but can you tell me where I would be apt to find Young Wild West?"

"I guess I can," was the reply. "Just go down the steps and turn to the left. You will see the big building that the office of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company is in, and right behind that, on a little knoll, is a neat little cottage. Young Wild West lives in that cottage. You can't miss it, boss."

"Thank you. Have a cigar."

He handed a handful to the conductor, and as each of

them had a fancy gilded band about it, that worthy opened wide his eyes.

"Imported, I guess," he remarked as he took them.

"Yes; they cost me two dollars apiece. But if you wasn't welcome to them I wouldn't give them to you. I have been left a big pile of money, you know, and I mean to be liberal. I thought I would come out West and spend some of it. I am a great admirer of the West, you know, and have been ever since I was big enough to read about it. I am going to see Young Wild West and try to hire him to take me around and see just what life in the West is. Do you think he would listen to a proposition of that kind?"

"He might, boss, if he takes a notion to you."

"He would be just the one to show me around, wouldn't he?"

"I should reckon so. If any one living can show you what the West is, Young Wild West can. He is the champion dead-shot in these parts, and they call him the Prince of the Saddle because there has never been a man found who can ride a horse like him. He is a model young fellow, too. He never tasted a drop of liquor in his life, and there has never been any one that could tell the truth and say that he ever did a wrong act in his life. Young Wild West is the dandy boy of the West, my friend, and if you get on the right side of him you will find out that you haven't made a mistake in seeking his acquaintance. Go right on down the steps and you will see his house right back of the big building. Thank you for the cigars."

"Not at all. Thank you for your information."

The stranger walked along the platform till he came to the steps and then he walked down.

The big building the conductor had spoken of was right before him, and when he reached it and came to the corner of it he found a short street that was neatly graded leading right to the door of a cottage that was painted white with green blinds.

The stranger unhesitatingly walked up to it and gave a knock on the front door.

It was opened a moment later by a Chinaman, who bowed politely and said:

"How doee?"

"Pretty well," answered the young man, smiling at the importance the Mongolian was putting on. "Is Mr. Young Wild West in?"

"Yes; Misler Wild in. You stepee in and I callee him."

A minute later a handsome boy with the face and figure of an Apollo came through the hall and stood before the visitor.

"You are Young Wild West, I presume?" remarked the tall young man, a look of admiration on his face as he spoke the words.

"Yes, sir. Young Wild West, at your service," was the reply in a frank, open tone that sounded musical to the wealthy tenderfoot from the East.

"Pardon me for intruding on you, but I came here to see you on business of importance. I am Harrie Eugene Lancaster, of Philadelphia."

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Lancaster," and Young Wild West put out his hand in true Western style. "We are a little late with what we term our supper here in Weston; won't you join us? I presume that you just came in on the train from Spondulicks?"

"Well, I did not come here to impose on your good nature, but as I have heard enough about you to feel that you never extend an invitation unless you are sincere in giving it, I will be only too glad to accept your hospitality."

"I assure you that if I had not wanted you to eat with us I should not have asked you," said Young Wild West with a smile. "Just step in here and you can have an opportunity to wash the dust of travel from you. There! Right in there! You will excuse me for a moment."

"Certainly. I shall not be long, as I have learned that it does not pay to waste time out here. I am a tenderfoot, but I must say that I have read enough to know something about your great and wild country."

Harrie Eugene Lancaster then repaired to the room pointed out, where he found water, soap and towels in plenty.

In a few minutes he had made a hasty toilet and stepped out into the other room, where he found Young Wild West awaiting him.

"Come," said the latter, "our supper is now ready for us."

"With pleasure," replied Lancaster.

Young Wild West led him through the hall into the dining room.

As they entered a boy of about the age of Wild arose.

He was a handsome, manly looking fellow, but unlike Young Wild West, he wore his hair short.

"This is Jim Dart, my chum and one of my partners," said Wild. "Jim, this is Mr. Harrie Eugene Lancaster, of Philadelphia."

The two shook hands.

"It is a pleasure to know you," said Lancaster.

"I can say the same to you, sir," retorted Jim.

"Well, now that we know each other, we will sit down and have something to eat," remarked Wild.

The table in the center of the room was already pretty well filled with steaming viands such as only a Chinese cook can prepare, and Lancaster opened his eyes wide as he saw some things before him that he had paid enormous prices for in the big cities.

But he was a gentlemanly, well-bred fellow, and he made no remarks concerning the provender at all, but sat down and proceeded with the meal in a matter-of-fact way.

The conversation during the meal was on various subjects that appertained to the West, and Lancaster asked not a few questions, which were readily and satisfactorily answered by Young Wild West and Jim Dart.

It was not until the meal was over and the cigars were lighted that the Philadelphian brought up the subject that had caused him to come out to the Black Hills and call on Young Wild West.

"Mr. West," said he, "I came out here to see you for the purpose of trying to induce you to take me on a trip through the West and show me what is to be seen. I have plenty of money at my command and will pay you well for your time. It has been running in my head for some time that I should like to be one of a party of rough riders and experience life as it is on the plains and mountains. Can you in any way possible spare the time to form such a party and lead us an adventurous trip for a few weeks?"

Young Wild West pushed back his long chestnut locks and gazed at the speaker in silence for a moment.

Then he said:

"Mr. Lancaster, I could manage to spare the time to make such a trip, and if you really wish it, and are satisfied to pay the expenses, I will do so with pleasure."

"Thank you, Young Wild West!" cried the Philadelphian, jumping from his chair and seizing the hand of our hero after the fashion of a happy schoolboy.

"You say you have plenty of money at hand, and that you want to spend some of it in seeing the Wild West?"

"Yes; that's just it. I am worth just two hundred thousand dollars, and I will pay you five thousand for a trip of three or four weeks."

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Lancaster; you'll simply have to pay the bills and wages of the men, who will have to lose their time in order to make up the party of rough riders you spoke about. You will pay them reasonable wages, such as may be agreed upon, and the entire expenses of the trip. Sixteen, including yourself, would be enough to make up the band of rough riders, I think."

"Oh, yes."

"Now, Mr. Lancaster, I would like to ask you a question."

"Ask me as many as you like," replied Lancaster, showing how willing he was to answer them.

"How was it that you came to seek me out?"

"I heard of you in my native city. I heard that you were the greatest scout, dead-shot, Indian fighter and all-around horseman in the West. I have also read some of your exploits in the Western newspapers. I picked you out as my ideal hero, and that is how I came to Weston to make my proposition to you. But I have forgotten one thing. I want to give you references as to and what I am, and I must insist that you find out before we go any further in this business. I desire you to telegraph to the following parties at my expense and inquire into my character, social standing, etc. Here are the names."

He handed over a long list of names and addresses, which Wild read over carefully.

Among them were the mayor of Philadelphia, three congressmen, the lieutenant-governor of Pennsylvania and a senator, besides three or four national banks.

"You certainly have very good references," remarked the Prince of the Saddle, with a smile. "Since you have insisted on it, I will make inquiries concerning you of two or three. But, Mr. Lancaster, I pride myself on being a good judge of a man, especially after I have conversed with him for awhile, and I must be frank with you and tell you to your face that I have taken a liking to you."

"I am glad to hear that," and the tenderfoot's face glowed with pleasure.

"Well, suppose we take a walk around town and introduce you to some of the boys who will be likely to make up the party of Rough Riders."

"That will just suit me. I want you to take me to the best hotel, so I can order my baggage sent over to it. I must have some sort of headquarters in Weston, you know, for I intend to stay here awhile before going East, after our trip is over."

"Well, if you think you can put up with a Chinese cook, you can stay right here with us till we get the party made up. What do you think about it, Jim?"

"It will be a pleasure to me to help entertain you, Mr. Lancaster," promptly retorted young Dart, who, like his chum, was very favorably impressed with the Philadelphian.

"I'll accept your hospitality, then," said Lancaster, bluntly. "I like you both as well as any two young fellows I ever met, and must say that I like your cook."

There was a good-natured laugh all around at this, and Wing Wah, the cook, who overheard the remark, came to the door, and bowing low, exclaimed:

"Me likee Melican man allee samee."

There was more laughter at this, and then, as Jim made a move as though he was going to pick up something and throw at him, the Chinaman disappeared.

A few minutes later Young Wild West, Jim Dart and

Lancaster left the house and started for the center of the town.

The two boys were attired in neat-fitting blue silk shirts and corduroy hunting breeches, their heads being topped off with the regulation Western sombreros, while the belts they wore contained the usual brace of revolvers and hunting knives.

The Philadelphia tenderfoot looked rather out of place with them with his tailor-made suit and Western hat, and Young Wild West felt certain that he was going to attract more or less attention.

He also expected to have the opportunity to see what sort of stuff the young man was made of before they got back to the house.

One of the new things in Weston was a concert hall.

All sorts of characters were patrons of this place.

Mine owners, cowboys, soldiers, civilized Indians and half-breeds, gamblers, outlaws, and the common, every-day bad man came there to drink and smoke and enjoy the variety performance that was given every afternoon and evening.

Wild thought that would be about as good a place as any to introduce the tenderfoot, so when they came to the place he walked up and bought three tickets.

Just as he had made his purchase two men attired in buckskin breeches and colored silk shirts came running up.

"Hello, there!" the taller of the two called out. "Going in to see the show?"

"Yes, Charlie," answered Wild. "You fellows might as well go in, too. I'll buy two more tickets."

"You had better not leave us out," remarked the other man, who was rather short and stout, and walked with a slight limp.

The young dead-shot quickly purchased two more tickets, and then as the two came up he introduced them to Harrie Eugene Lancaster as his remaining partners in the mining business at Weston.

The tall, athletic-looking man of thirty was Cheyenne Charlie, a famous scout, and he pulled his dark whiskers and smiled patronizingly when he shook hands with the tenderfoot.

The other, who was addicted to limping when he walked, was Jack Robedee, who had also seen much service as an Indian fighter and scout. He had lost a leg in a fight with some cattle ropers, but had a cork member now, and got along remarkably well with it.

"From Philadelphia, hey?" observed Robedee. "Well, I've been in that town many a time afore I come out West. You see, I was born in the East myself."

"I am glad to hear that," laughed Lancaster. "Then you was a tenderfoot once."

"Yes; I reckon I was. But I soon got over it, as I reckon you will. Just got into town?"

"Yes; I came all the way out here to see Young Wild West, and I found him in less than five minutes after I got off the train."

"What do you say if we go in and see the show begin?"

interrupted Cheyenne Charlie. "That big drum is bein' pounded like ther mischief to let folks know that things are goin' to start up right away."

"Certainly. We will go right in," replied the Philadelphian. "We don't want to miss any of the performance. This will be the first show I have seen in the Wild West, and I want to see it all."

Falling in line with those who were going in, the five followed.

CHAPTER II.

WILD PICKS OUT HIS ROUGH RIDERS.

Young Wild West and his companions found a goodly crowd in the place when they entered.

The building was poorly lighted and the ventilation was worse than bad.

The smoke from about fifty cigars and pipes gave the atmosphere a decided foggy aspect.

A single aisle ran between two lines of benches, and Wild had paused long enough to locate a bench where they could all sit together, he led the way up to it.

The orchestra was playing its loudest now and the waiters were hustling around soliciting orders for cigars and drinks.

But that did not take all the attention of those who had gathered there to while away the evening.

It was Young Wild West's first appearance at the concert hall, and when he showed up those who were well acquainted with him and those who were not looked at him with interest.

Of course, when they looked at Wild, they could not very well miss seeing Harrie Eugene Lancaster.

The five had scarcely taken their seat when the word "tenderfoot" could be heard from different parts of the room.

No one noticed this any quicker than did the tenderfoot himself.

"They're making fun of me," he said, with a smile. "Well, I don't care if that is all they do."

Just then the curtain went up and the show began.

It so happened that a couple of comedians came out, and after they had rendered a song-and-dance they began a humorous dialogue.

They were really funny, and the Philadelphian, who enjoyed such things, laughed as loud as any of the rest.

His laughing attracted the attention of almost everybody, including the comedians themselves.

Then they started in to make him the butt of their remarks.

He took it all good-naturedly, however, and the comedians were just letting up on him when three half-drunken men changed their seats and got on the bench behind our friends.

Young Wild West saw this move, and he concluded right away that they were up to some mischief.

And he was right, too, for they had no more than dropped

upon the bench before one of them jabbed a pin in Lancaster's back.

He jumped up with a startled cry, and then turning as quick as a flash dealt the man behind him a blow in the face with his fist.

He happened to hit the right one, for a wonder, and our hero smiled satisfactorily when he saw the fellow fall over backward and strike the floor with a bang.

"I don't mind you having fun with me," said the young man, hotly, "but when it comes to sticking pins in me I draw the line. You fellow, who think you are so smart, I will take you outside and thrash you, if you dare to go!"

"Sit down, you giraffe!" roared the fellow who had been sitting next to the one who had been knocked from the bench so suddenly. "Sit down, or I'll shoot holes through you, so's I kin see the show!"

He flashed a revolver in his hand as he made the remark, and then Young Wild West thought it time to interfere.

"Drop that shooter!" he said, calmly. "Just sit down yourself and don't interfere with the performance."

It so happened that the three men were strangers in town and did not know Young Wild West.

"Who are you talkin' to, you young whipper-snapper?" retorted the fellow. "If you don't shet up I'll chuck you out of here."

That was enough for Wild.

With a quick movement he knocked the man's revolver from his hand, and then catching him by the collar, flung him over the bench.

By this time the fellow Lancaster had knocked down was on his feet.

He was in the act of drawing his revolver when the tenderfoot dealt him a blow on the point of the jaw that caused him to drop senseless to the floor.

"I may be a tenderfoot," he called out loud enough for all hands to hear, "but I can just thrash all such people as that fellow, and do it easily, too."

"Right you are, pard," exclaimed Cheyenne Charlie. "We came in here to enjoy ourselves an' see ther show, an', by ginger! ther next man what interferes with us will feel lead in his system."

The third man had risen to his feet, but he had not offered to draw his revolver.

"Let it drop, won't yar?" he said to the scout. "We was only foolin'."

"Just get your two friends in some other part of the hall," spoke up Wild. "That's it. I believe you are the best one of the three. Get right over there where you were before you came over here to stick the pin in the tenderfoot. That's it. Now sit down."

Then turning to the stage, he added:

"Go on with the show, gentlemen. I guess there won't be any further trouble."

The orchestra had ceased playing when the row started, and it now struck up with renewed vigor.

The comedians finished their act, and the applause rang out just as if nothing had stopped the performance at all.

And the best part of it was that the audience let up passing remarks about the tenderfoot.

Wild was very favorably impressed with the Philadelphian.

That he knew how to use his hands was more than evident.

And he showed that he possessed considerable nerve, too.

Nothing occurred to interfere with the performance, and our friends stayed until it was over with.

Those who did not know much about Young Wild West's way of doing business learned all about him from those who did, and that was why the matter was dropped so quickly.

"Him an' his partners would have cleared out ther place if any one else had interfered," one of them said to the man in the trio who had acted sensible in getting the other two back to the seats they had occupied at first.

"Well, I calculate he's putty soon," was the rejoinder. "My! but he did chuck Ben over that bench too quick for anything!"

"Yes, an' he could have chucked a half a dozen fellers over ther bench so fast that they'd all be tangled up together. Then if they'd got up an' pulled all their shooters at once he'd either have dropped 'em all, or made 'em hold up their hands. Young Wild West is ther quickest mortal in these parts, an' he kin whip his weight in wild cats with weepens, or with hands an' feet alone."

The bad men were not a little impressed with this sort of talk.

They had seen enough of the boy to know that it was pretty near the truth.

Our friends went out of the concert hall and then walked over to the Gazoo Hotel, which was kept by a very decent sort of a man named Brown.

Some of Wild's friends and admirers followed them, no doubt thinking there would be more fun with the tenderfoot before the night was over.

Young Wild West bought cigars for the five, and they remained there for half an hour, those who had expected to see some fun being disappointed, for no one offered to insult the tenderfoot.

As they walked back to their homes Wild told Cheyenne Charlie and Jack Robedee what Lancaster had come to Weston for.

They were favorably impressed with the idea of forming a company of rough riders and making a tour of the mountains and plains, and they looked upon the Philadelphian as being a pretty smart sort of a fellow to think of such a thing.

Of course they were willing to go on such a trip.

Where Young Wild West went they were only too glad to go, under any and all conditions.

They parted for the night at the corner near the bank.

Wild, Jim and Lancaster went on to the cottage, and Charlie and Jim repaired to their respective homes, where they had wives waiting for them.

Wild and Jim were engaged to be married, but the time was yet a long ways off when they would become benedicts.

They were only boys, and they wanted to get a little age upon them before launching upon the sea of matrimony.

When they got back to the house the tenderfoot put his hand in his pocket and drew forth a roll of bills.

Selecting a hundred-dollar note from the roll, he tendered it to Wild, saying:

"Before we go any further, I had better give you something to pay for the little incidentals, such as to-night. I want to pay for everything, you know."

"That's all right," replied the young dead-shot, "but we are not yet working for you, you know. Just put that money back in your pocket. It will be time enough for you to spend it when the company is organized."

"All right; just as you say. I know you mean what you say, so here it goes back in my pocket."

"That's the place for it to-night, anyway. To-morrow it may be different, for I guess I will begin organizing the rough riders."

"Not until you have inquired about me of the people I referred you to."

"I shall telegraph a couple of them the first thing in the morning, as I said I would. You are very exact on that point, and I don't blame you. There is nothing like knowing who is who, especially in the West."

Lancaster was given a neatly furnished room, and he slept as soundly that night as he had done since he left his native city in the East.

The next morning Young Wild West got up pretty early.

Before going to sleep the night before he had thought the whole thing over, and he had come to the conclusion that it would be a great scheme to go out with a party of rough riders.

The tenderfoot was willing to pay for it, so there would be no trouble in getting the men.

Wild walked over to the station as soon as he saw the operator go into the telegraph office.

He sent two brief messages, one to the mayor of Philadelphia, and the other to a national bank in the same city, inquiring into the character and habits of Harrie Eugene Lancaster.

Then he went back to the house, and was in time to find Jim Dart and their guest ready for breakfast.

The tenderfoot was delighted at the way he was being used.

It might be said that he was the proudest man in the whole West.

It was not every one who could become the guest of the great and only Young Wild West.

That is the way Lancaster figured it, and he was about right.

Young Wild West left the tenderfoot to the care of Jim Dart that morning, while he went around and began picking out the men for his rough riders.

He had not the least idea but that the Philadelphian was just as he represented himself to be, so, being captivated by the idea, he got right down to business.

One of the first men he asked to join was Dove-Eye Dave, the pioneer resident of the town.

Though he was pretty close to seventy, Dove-Eye Dave was a marvel in courage and strength.

In a little more than two hours Wild had selected fourteen men and boys and had found them all only too glad to join the rough riders for the period of one month at a salary of a hundred dollars each for that time.

When he had picked them out he went over to the post-office.

His sweetheart was there about every day assisting her grandfather, Sam Murdock, in his duties as postmaster.

"Hello, Et!" he called out, as he walked out and found her in the office alone. "There is something up again, so I thought I had better come and tell you."

"What is it now, Wild?" asked the pretty, golden-haired girl, as she leaned over the counter expectantly.

"I am organizing a band of rough riders."

"A band of rough riders?"

"Yes."

"Well, what are you doing that for? Have the Indians broke out again?"

"No; not that I know of. I am doing this for the benefit of a young man from Philadelphia, who has lots of money and will pay for it. He came to Weston on purpose to see me and get me to do it. It is now an assured thing, almost, that I will. We will be gone about three or four weeks."

"Where are you going?"

"I have not decided yet. It is simply going to be an adventurous trip for the benefit of the tenderfoot, you know. He is a fine young man, Et, and I will introduce him to you some time to-day. He is pretty well educated, mannerly, and has lots of money at his command. And, let me tell you, he has some grit in his make-up, too. He knocked a man down for sticking a pin in him last night too quick for anything. You see, we went into the concert hall up the street here, and the tenderfoot being dressed in the stylish cut of the East, the miners and cowboys took to making all sorts of fun of him. He stood it till one of them used the pin, and then times were in!"

"I suppose you took a hand in it then?"

"I had to, Et, but there was no harm done; it all quieted down in short order."

The pretty girl tossed her head.

"You are always standing up for the rights of others, Wild," she said. "It is a fine trait in you, but I am afraid it will be the means of getting you into serious trouble some of these times."

"Well, I have been in serious trouble from it more than once, but I always got out of it somehow," was the laughing reply. "Now, Arietta Murdock, don't you say anything more about it. If you want to talk to me, change the subject."

The subject was changed a minute or two later, and for nearly an hour they talked away as lovers usually do.

When noon came Wild walked home with his sweetheart and then crossed over to the office of the Wild West Mining and Improvement Company, where he saw his partners and Lancaster standing as though waiting for him.

As the handsome young Prince of the Saddle came up

and paused before them, Rex Moore, the bookkeeper of the concern, came out and handed him a telegram.

"It came a few minutes ago," he said, "and as I knew you would be along pretty soon to go to your dinner, I did not go to look for you."

Wild took the telegram, and opening it, found that it was from the mayor of the city Lancaster hailed from.

"Harrie Eugene Lancaster is an honest, upright young man and has my hearty recommendation. I have known him since he was a small child."

That was the reply to our hero's query from one of the parties he had telegraphed to.

He was not in the least surprised at receiving such a favorable answer, but he was gratified just the same.

"Mr. Lancaster, your mayor says you are all right," he remarked, handing over the telegram to the tenderfoot.

"I knew he would," was the reply, and then he read it with a pleased smile.

"I didn't doubt that you were what you represented yourself to be. If I had I should not have asked you to be the guest of myself and Jim," Wild assured him.

"Then I suppose it is about settled that you will organize the rough riders, and that I am to be one of them."

"Yes; that is settled."

Lancaster gave a whoop like a happy schoolboy might have done.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROUGH RIDERS START ON THEIR TRIP.

After they had eaten dinner and Lancaster had brought out some of the high-priced cigars he had with him, the three left the house and walked down to the office of the company.

They had not been there long when those whom Wild had picked out began to assemble.

A few minutes past one they were all there.

Then the young dead-shot took out a note-book and began calling off their names.

"Jim Dart."

"Here!"

"Harrie Eugene Lancaster."

"Present!"

"Cheyenne Charlie."

"Here!"

"Jack Robedee."

"Here!"

"Dove-Eye Dave."

"Present!"

"Bub Sprague."

"Here!"

"Dan Wells."

"I'm here!"

"Wal Wisp."

"Present!"

"Easy Edward."

"On deck!"

"Davy Rubber."

"Here!"

"Joe Lemperle."

"Present!"

"Pete Bamberger."

"Here!"

"Bill O'Brien."

"Here!"

"Ad Jackson."

"Here!"

"Pat Gaffney."

"Prisint."

"We are all here, I see. Well, there are fifteen of you, and I make the sixteenth," observed Wild. "Now, let me introduce you all to Mr. Harrie Lancaster, of Philadelphia, who will stand all the expenses of the trip."

Lancaster stepped up and bowed, and then gave a little speech lasting ten minutes.

In concluding he said:

"Gentlemen, I have been introduced to you as 'Mister,' but I don't want any of you to mister me from this time out. Just call me Harrie. I am going out with you on this rough riding trip, and I want to be as much like you all in everything as I possibly can. Remember that I am just plain Harrie Lancaster."

"Three cheers for Young Wild's West Rough Riders!" some one shouted.

The rafters of the building fairly shook then.

There was not a man of the fifteen who did not love Young Wild West like a brother.

And they were always waiting for the opportunity to give him a cheer or a word of praise.

The cheering had scarcely subsided when a messenger boy came in with another telegram for Wild.

He tore it open and read aloud the following:

"In reply to your query would say that Harrie Eugene Lancaster is a gentleman in the true sense of the word, and that he has a high standing among all those who know him. Financially he rates at the top."

At this Jim Dart proposed three cheers for the Philadelphia tenderfoot.

They were given with a will, and then Young Wild West took occasion to remark:

"Boys, this telegram is from the president of a national bank in the big city of Philadelphia. It is an excellent recommendation for the young man who has induced me to organize this band of Rough Riders, and I want to tell you all that I feel highly honored at being selected to do such a thing. There are plenty of men in the Wild West whom he might have selected to take him on a trip of pleasure and adventure, but it seems he came direct to Weston to find me and make his wants known."

"Well, you see, I had only read and heard of one Young Wild West, and he was the one I wanted," spoke up Lancaster. "Now, I would like to ask how long it will take to get our company in shape to start. I want every man

dressed alike except the captain, who will wear a rig that is a little more fancy to distinguish him from the rest. The regular hunting suit of buckskin would be the proper thing, would it not, Mr. West?"

"Yes; I don't know of any rig that would suit better. But see here, Harrie, though I am to be the leader of the Rough Riders, I want you all to bear it in mind that I am altogether too young to be mistered. I am something like you, Harrie, so please call me Wild—you and all the rest."

"All right, Wild," and then everybody laughed, some because they did not know of any present who did not call him Wild, and others at the prompt reply the tenderfoot gave him.

Then they got down into the real work of the thing, and in a couple of hours it was all settled that they should leave Weston two days later for a trip through the wildest part of Wyoming.

A big portion of their time was to be spent in the Rocky Mountains, and the tenderfoot was to be given a taste of bear hunting along with the rest.

Lancaster declared over and over again that he wanted Young Wild West to have all to do with the preparations.

He did not even want him to consult any one else in any of the small matters that came up.

"This is going to be Young Wild West's Rough Riders, pure and simple," he said. "You are going to run it your way, and not any one else's."

Wild went over to Spondulicks the next morning and bought the things that could not be purchased in Weston.

Every man had his own horse with the exception of the tenderfoot himself, and Wild picked out a fine black for him that was gentle as well as speedy.

When the time came for them to start they were as finely equipped as any band of men that ever rode over prairie grass.

The only thing the handsome young leader had about him to distinguish him from the rest was a wide band of blue silk about his sombrero.

Lancaster thought this was hardly enough, but he said nothing when Wild said that was all that was required, if there was anything required at all.

Young Wild West's Rough Riders were of all ages.

There were two or three old men among them, and some were only eighteen or twenty.

All of them knew how to ride and shoot, too, and there was a good entertainer among them.

This was Bub Sprague, a former variety artist and owner of a traveling show.

He was one of the foremen of the big mine owned by Young Wild West and his three partners, Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart and Jack Robedee, but the boy thought he could be spared to go along on the trip, as they would need some one to put a little life in the party when things got to be monotonous.

Every time our friends went on a journey to be gone any length of time their sweethearts and wives assembled at the post-office to see them off, and when Wild rode out of the little square in front of the office of the Wild West Mining

and Improvement Company and turned the corner at the head of the finely equipped band of men, the ladies were at the post-office waiting for them.

Though it was nearly a quarter of a mile off, the post-office could be seen from that point, and Wild saw who were there to see them off.

Of course the usual good-bys had been gone through with before, and this was simply a case of being where they could see the start, and take in the sight of the handsome young leader riding at the head of his picked band of Rough Riders.

The party of sixteen rode along at a canter and soon reached the post-office, when the horses came down to a walk.

The men and boys looked spick and span in their new hunting rigs, and the harness and trappings on the steeds shone to the best advantage.

There was some cheering, waving of handkerchiefs, and doffing of hats, and then the little cavalcade rode by.

Harrie Eugene Lancaster had started on the trip that he had longed so many times to take, and he was the happiest one in the party, because he felt that he was now a full-fledged Rough Rider himself.

They were well stocked with everything that they could carry in their saddle-bags with convenience, so the trip promised to be one of unalloyed pleasure.

That is what Lancaster thought, but Wild and some of the rest were hardly of that opinion.

Renegades and bad Indians were pretty thick in that section at the time of which we write, and the unexplored parts of the country were not few.

As the horsemen left the town of Weston behind them Bub Sprague set up a rollicking song.

Bub was a pretty good singer, and he had a way of expressing a song that made it sound good, anyhow.

When he had finished, the tenderfoot, who was not sitting as gracefully in the saddle as he might, thanked him and asked him to oblige with another.

He did so, making the cliffs echo with his loud voice.

Lancaster enjoyed himself greatly all day long, but when night came it was with a feeling of relief that he thought the horseback riding was over for the day.

"I guess I will enjoy the saddle better after I have become more used to it," he remarked.

"It will not take you long to get used to riding," Wild replied. "By the time we get back from the trip you will be a full-fledged horseman."

"I just hope I am, that's all."

There was nothing elaborate about the camp of the Rough Riders.

They had brought no tents along, but each had two blankets, a woolen one and a rubber one.

They had to sleep in the open air, but that climate in the summer was very healthful, and there was no danger of any one catching cold.

Wild appointed two men to act as guards the first half of the night, and two for the last half.

Then they sat down around the campfire and the Rough

Riders amused themselves by telling stories and playing cards.

It must have been about nine o'clock in the evening when one of the guards came in and reported that there were three men out on the trail who desired to stop with them over night.

"Let them come in and we will talk to them," Young Wild West answered.

A couple of minutes the three strangers came walking into the camp, leading their horses.

One of them was a black-bearded man, with a certain degree of refinement about him, and the others were typical bordermen.

"We were riding along in search of a good spot to put up for the night," said the man with the black beard, "when we suddenly saw your campfire shining through the trees. That made us feel like stopping with you, so when we came upon your guard we asked him if we could do so."

"Well, I rather think none of us have any objections to your staying with us over night, strangers," Wild told him. "Where did you come from, anyway?"

"From Devil Creek."

It was one of the other men who made this reply.

"Yes; we come from Devil Creek," spoke up the bearded man. "That is, there is where we come from since I have been riding horseback. I am from Chicago, and I took it in my head that I would like to make a trip in the saddle from Devil Creek to Cheyenne City. That is where we are bound. My name is John Ralph. These two men, who I engaged to accompany me on the trip, are Dave Moorehouse and Happy Buckalew. They were recommended to me by the leading hotel man at Devil Creek."

"Well," said Wild, when he had sized all three of them up and arrived at the conclusion that the bearded man was disguised and that the other two were a couple of villains, "you are welcome to stay with us to-night. We are not the sort to drive strangers away."

"Thank you," exclaimed John Ralph. "Now may I ask to whom we are indebted for this hospitality?"

"Certainly. My name is Young Wild West, and these are my Rough Riders."

"Oh, I am glad to meet you, Young Wild West. It seems to me I heard your name mentioned at Devil Creek."

"Of course yer did," remarked the fellow who had been introduced as Dave Moorehouse. "Young Wild West's name is mentioned very often in our town. It was him what boomed ther place an' put it in ther way of gittin' to be what it is. I knowed it was Young Wild West as soon as I sot eyes on him; I've seen him a few times, I reckon."

Wild looked hard at the speaker.

He did not recollect having seen him before, but he thought he might be telling the truth, for all that.

"Dave is right, boss," observed the other.

"Of course. Happy knows I'm always right. I'm his father-in-law, an' I reckon he's seen enough of me to know that I'm putty near right when I say a thing."

This remark from Moorehouse caused every one within hearing to smile.

If the man was a villain he certainly had a comical way about him.

And so it was with the other fellow, whom they called Happy, for when he remarked that "he guessed he'd known Moorehouse altogether longer than he oughter," our friends could not repress a laugh.

The trio had provisions with them, and when they asked permission to use the fire to make coffee it was promptly given them.

A little later Lancaster called Young Wild West aside.

"Do you know one thing, Wild?" he said. "It strikes me that I have seen that man with the whiskers before. If it was not for the heavy beard I would be willing to swear that he is the fellow who tried to rob me on the train just before we got into Spondulicks."

"Is that so?" retorted our hero. "Well, the beard makes no difference in the case, then, for I am of the opinion that it is a false one."

"Do you really think that?"

"Yes."

"Well, if that is so it is certainly the man. Somehow he found out that I had a big sum of money with me, or else he imagined it. I was looking out for just such fellows as he, and when he tried to make friends with me I wouldn't have it. But he stuck to it, and just as we were coming into the depot at Spondulicks he took advantage of the fact that I had fallen into a doze and slipped his hand in the inside of my vest. I woke and knocked him down too quick to talk about! He got on his feet and ran out of the car, jumping off while the train was yet going at a pretty good speed. He is the man, you can bet, and he is following me up to rob me."

"I rather think you are right on that point. How much money are you carrying with you, anyway?"

"I have got nearly ten thousand dollars in banknotes stowed away in various parts of my clothing."

"You shouldn't have brought that much money with you. You could have left the greater part of that in the bank at Weston."

"I know I should. But I have been through the toughest parts of New York and Chicago with more than that much about me, and I never got robbed yet."

"You have been a lucky man. I hope you will be as lucky while you are out here in the Western wilds."

"What shall we do about this man?"

"Simply watch him, that's all. If he is the man who tried to rob you on the train he will be bound to show his hand before morning."

"And if he tries to rob me again?"

"Shoot him."

"Do you mean that, Wild?"

"Certainly. That is the way we do things out here. He will deserve getting shot, won't he?"

"Yes."

"You needn't necessarily kill him, you know. Give him a bullet in the wrist or leg—something to make him remember you and let you alone in the future. That would be

the best way. Then if his hired tools interfere and go to draw their shooters something will happen."

"I see," and the tenderfoot smiled.

An hour later all hands but the guards turned in.

The three men laid their blankets on the pine needles that covered the ground the same as the Rough Riders, and it was not long before the snoring of Moorehouse and Happy could be heard all over the camp.

Wild took it on himself to lie down pretty close to Lancaster.

He wanted to be right there in case the tenderfoot was in danger of being robbed.

He remained awake for over an hour, and then he fell asleep in spite of himself.

It must have been close to daylight when he was awakened by a slight noise.

It was a sound that appeared to be made with caution, and that was why it aroused Young Wild West.

Those were the sort of sounds that he had trained himself to be on the lookout for.

He did not sit bolt upright and look around when he heard the sound.

He simply lay perfectly still and opened his eyes half-way.

Then he looked over to where Lancaster lay.

Some one covered with a blanket was lying so close to the Philadelphian that the blade of a knife could not have been run between them without touching them both.

Wild slipped his hand to his revolver.

No one had been lying there when he went to sleep.

It was quite certain that some one had moved there for the purpose of robbing Lancaster.

Just as he got hold of his revolver the figure was covered by the blanket.

Our hero saw a hand feeling about the clothing of the sleeping young man.

He thought it time something was done, so he kicked Lancaster on the foot and cried out:

"Wake up, Harrie. Some one is going through you!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE SNEAK THIEF.

The words had scarcely left the lips of Wild when Lancaster let out his arms and caught the fellow about the neck.

"I've got him!" he cried, excitedly. "I've got him, Wild!"

The blanket was tossed from the man as he struggled to free himself, and then by the aid of the smoldering fire-light Young Wild West saw the bearded face of John Ralph.

"Be quiet, you treacherous hound!" said the boy, in his calm, placid way. "Make another move and I'll send a bullet through your rascally head!"

There was no mistaking the meaning of the words, and the villain became suddenly quiet.

The tenderfoot now got a grip on his throat and threw him over on his back as though he had been a mere child.

The whole camp was aroused now, and rising to his feet, Wild called out:

"Boys, just see that none of our three guests get away from the camp!"

At this juncture the sound of galloping hoofs came to his ears.

Then two shots rang out in quick succession.

He understood it all now.

The other two men had been at the outskirts of the camp with the horses, waiting for John Ralph to get the Philadelphian's money.

Hearing the rumpus caused by the discovery of the thief, they had mounted and were now making their escape.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart ran in the direction the shots had come from, their revolvers in their hands ready for instant use.

They were met by one of the guards.

"They're gone!" he cried, excitedly. "I shot at 'em, but it was too dark for me to draw a bead on 'em. There was two of 'em; the other one must be in ther camp yet."

"Yes; ther other measley coyote is here yet," answered the scout. "Young Wild West has got him all right."

"What was ther matter with 'em, anyhow?"

"I don't jest know, but somethin' is decidedly wrong with 'em, you kin bet."

Charlie and Jim ran back to ask their leader if they should mount and follow the villains.

"No," replied Wild, when they came running up to where he stood. "Let them go; we've got the one we want. The others were only his tools, anyway."

Lancaster had succeeded in taking the weapons away from John Ralph, for it was none other than he, and he sat on his prostrate body, waiting for Young Wild West to tell him what to do.

"Let him up," said the young Prince of the Saddle.

The tenderfoot at once got off the prostrate form.

The man with the heavy beard remained perfectly still.

"Get up!" commanded Wild.

"Mercy!" pleaded the scoundrel. "If I have done anything wrong I am not aware of it. I am a sleep-walker."

"A sleep-walker, eh? Well, you didn't happen to be walking when I caught you in the act of going through our friend here. Just be kind enough to take off that false beard you have on."

Instead of obeying the command the scoundrel sprang to his feet and started to run away.

Crack!

It was Young Wild West's revolver that spoke, and as the report rang out Ralph dropped to the ground, uttering a cry of pain.

"Get up and come here! You are not badly hurt!" cried Wild.

It was astonishing to see how quickly the man got upon his feet again.

He came slowly back, the picture of abject misery and humiliation.

"I guess you ain't hurt much," resumed our hero. "I only shot to graze your left arm. Now, then, just kindly take off that false beard."

Ralph did not wait to be told again.

He very quickly removed the beard.

"That's him!" exclaimed Lancaster. "He's the same man who tried to rob me on the train!"

"Ther poor fool!" said Cheyenne Charlie, in a sneering tone. "As if he didn't know any better than to foller Young Wild West's Rough Riders for ther purpose of robbin' one of 'em. Ther poor fool! Fetch out a lariat, somebody, an' we'll treat him ther same as we do a horse thief!"

"Mercy! Mercy!" screamed the culprit, his knees knocking together and his teeth beginning to chatter.

"You need mercy to be taken on you, I reckon," retorted the scout, grimly smiling. "A sneak thief ain't any better than a horse thief, an' a horse thief is as bad as a murderer. I vote to hang you to that pine tree, I do."

At this the man dropped to the ground from fright.

As handy as he was at robbing people, he was but the meanest kind of a coward, after all.

"We will attend to his case after it gets daylight," spoke up Wild. "Just tie him to that tree, boys."

There was not one word of objection now that the leader of the Rough Riders had spoken, and in a minute or two John Ralph was secured to a tree.

Some of the men did not lie down again, as it was so near morning, but there were those among them who thought it advisable to get all the sleep they could when they were on such trips.

Sometimes things occurred that did not give them the privilege of getting their rest for two or three days at a time.

Young Wild West was one of those to turn in again, and he was soon sound asleep.

The sun was up when he arose and went to the brook that trickled near to take a good wash.

About half the Rough Riders were up, and a good fire was burning brightly, ready to cook the morning meal.

When Wild had finished his toilet he looked around and found Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart to be missing.

"Charlie found ther track of a bear," explained Robedee. "He asked Jim to go with him to git it."

Just then the sharp report of a rifle broke the stillness.

"There goes ther bear now, I guess," Robedee added.

"I shouldn't be surprised if that is a fact," our hero replied.

Those who had been assigned to do the cooking for the party now put the coffee on and began to get the venison that had been killed the day before ready for broiling.

Breakfast was just ready when Charlie and Jim came in with the haunches of a bear.

They hung the meat to a limb of the tree John Ralph was tied to, and then went to the brook to wash up.

"I reckon ther bear steaks will go good for dinner," observed the scout, who was very fond of that kind of meat.

"Yes," answered Wild. "There will be enough in those two hams to give us all a taste."

No one paid any attention to the prisoner while they were eating breakfast.

The villain had been making desperate efforts to free himself ever since he had been tied to the tree.

And he had made good headway at it.

He found that he now had loosened the ropes that bound his hands enough to get them free.

All it needed was a sharp tug.

It could not have been a better time to act than when the Rough Riders were at their breakfast.

He watched his chance, and then, when he was certain that no one was looking his way, he gave the required tug and released his hands.

Then he remained perfectly quiet for a minute or two.

Since daylight the villain had been looking around the camp and near the vicinity.

He could see where the horses were, and he easily singled out his own, which had been brought back by the guard when his two companions had made their escape.

John Ralph was an expert at sneaking tricks.

He had an idea that if he once got free he could reach his horse and get away.

Now he was going to try it.

He had an idea that his captors would not use him any worse than they intended to now if they caught him.

Three minutes from the time he slipped his bonds from his hands he was free from the tree.

He dropped to the ground and began sneaking toward the horses, making a slight detour through the bushes.

The Rough Riders were laughing and chatting as they drank their coffee, not thinking of their captive just then.

Ralph got to his horse with little difficulty.

Then he had a good opportunity to saddle the animal, since the rest of the horses shut him from the view of the men.

One thing Ralph was not going to run the risk of doing.

That was to get hold of a weapon.

He was too much of a coward for that, since he would have to come in contact with some of the Rough Riders to do it.

Trembling at the thought that the men might shoot him as he rode away, he got upon the horse's back.

Then he rode him clear of the rest and urged him into a gallop.

Young Wild West and his companions heard the hoofbeats of the horse, and they sprang to their feet instantly.

But the escaping villain had rounded a dense clump of trees, and they did not catch sight of him.

Our hero thought of the prisoner all of a sudden, and looking toward the tree he saw that he was gone.

"Boys, Mr. John Ralph, as he called himself, has got the best of us, after all. See, he is gone!" he exclaimed.

"Great Scott!" said Lancaster. "I forgot all about him!"

"Hadn't we better go an' catch him?" asked Cheyenne Charlie, who always had it in for evil doers.

"I can't see where there would be any use in catching him," replied Wild. "We don't want to be bothered with him as a prisoner. Let him go. He hasn't a knife or a revolver with him, and that will be punishment enough for him if he strikes worse company than his own."

"That flesh wound you gave him will be apt to make him remember us for awhile, anyway," spoke up the tenderfoot. "I thought sure you killed him when you fired."

"I had no such intention. I did just what I tried to do—touch his arm with the bullet."

"Well, that is what I call accurate shooting. And didn't he drop, though! He acted as though he was either killed, or mortally wounded."

"That is generally the way with such men as he. Some of them will drop even if they only hear the sing of a bullet. They drop to keep you from firing another shot. Life is sweet to them, and they hate to run the risk of being cut off so short as all that."

The incident caused by the advent of the three villains in the camp was soon forgotten, and a few minutes later Young Wild West's Rough Riders were in the saddle and on their way for the wildest part of the Rockies.

During the day Wild gave the Philadelphian several lessons in shooting.

He found him an apt pupil, eager and anxious to learn.

The boys shot plenty of game that day, and meat they did not eat they salted and took along with them.

Though it was mid-summer the air was cool and bracing on the range, and the promoter of Young Wild West's Rough Riders enjoyed it immensely.

They saw nothing of either of the three villains who had come to their camp the night before, and when they went into camp that night they were not disturbed.

It was near noon on the next day that they struck a portion of the range that was wild and picturesque in the extreme.

Just as the tenderfoot was expressing his admiration at what he saw, the shrill scream of a female rang out.

It came from around a bend about fifty yards ahead of them, and instantly the Rough Riders urged their horses to a faster gait.

Wild led the way around the bend just as another shriek rang out.

Then they saw an old man dash out of a cabin and seize a frightened girl by the arm and raise a club to strike her.

Wild leveled his revolver.

CHAPTER V.

A CASE OF "DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND."

John Ralph breathed a deep sigh of relief when no shots were fired at him and he could hear no signs of pursuit.

But he kept urging his horse forward, and it was not until he had covered two or three miles that he came down to an easier pace.

The villain was a stranger in those parts and not much used to the saddle, anyway.

That made his position one not to be envied, since he knew not which way to turn.

He had depended strictly upon Moorehouse and Happy to lead him through the wilderness till they found his intended victim.

Being without arms, he began to worry over his plight as he rode along.

"If I could only strike my two partners," he muttered. "I wonder where they went, anyhow? I suppose they did right in leaving when they found I had been caught, but I think they ought to have remained somewhere in the vicinity. That Young Wild West is the greatest fellow I ever saw, but I'll get even with him for blocking my game, see if I don't. There are more than one way to kill a cat. He may be all right at shooting and fighting, but I guess I can learn him something when it comes to cunning."

He rode along, picking his way over the rough mountain-side as best he could, for a couple of hours.

Then he began to grow hungry.

The villain had been in hopes all along of finding a trail of some kind, but had failed.

In his hasty flight he had forgotten to follow the trail made by his companions, for there had been a chance for him to do it, as there was plenty of grass near the camp of our friends.

But it was too late now, and being weary and hungry, he at length came to a halt and dismounted to try to study out some plan of action.

He tied his horse by the side of a little mountain stream, and then after indulging in a good drink, sat down on a rock.

He had plenty of food for thought, but none to eat.

While the rascal sat there meditating a rifle shot suddenly sounded.

He sprang to his feet as though the bullet had come within an ace of hitting him, when in reality it did not come that way at all.

While he stood there trembling in fright he heard a crashing in the bushes, and the next moment a bear came into view.

The creature was wounded, and seeing the man standing there, it made for him with an angry growl.

John Ralph made a break for his horse.

He had no desire to furnish a meal for the bear just then.

As he got to his horse, another shot rang out and the bear staggered along a few paces and fell dead.

Then a thrill of hope shot through the villain's frame.

Some one had shot the bear and they would surely come there!

It mattered little to him whether it proved to be a friend or foe.

He had lost his way, and he felt that he would surely starve to death unless some one came to show him the way to civilization.

Without untying his horse, he stood there waiting for somebody to appear.

And he did not have to wait long, for presently two men burst from the bushes and ran toward the fallen bear.

"Glory!" shouted Ralph, joyously, for he recognized the two as Moorehouse and Happy.

"Is it you, boss?" the pair asked in a breath.

"Yes, yes! And I am so glad to see you that I can hardly express myself. Why didn't you hang around the camp and try to get me away from those fellows?"

"We did hang around as close as we dared to, after we found they didn't come after us," said Moorehouse. "We was about half a mile away when they mounted and started off. But we thought you was with 'em a prisoner, boss; or else that they'd shot you or somethin'. That's right, ain't it, Happy?"

"Yes, boss, that's right. Dave's got it straight for once in his life, anyhow. We hung around till them Rough Rider fellers got out of sight, an' then we started off kinder sad like, thinkin' that you was either dead, or a prisoner. We rode along, and putty soon we struck a trail. We looked an' found that it was made only by one horse, so we reckoned we'd better foller it an' see what there was in it. That's right, ain't it, Dave?"

"Yes; that's right, boss. Happy is tellin' ther truth for once in his life, anyhow."

John Ralph could not repress a smile.

He had known the men but a couple of days, but during that time he had learned that they were the most peculiar pair he had ever met.

Father-in-law and son-in-law, they got along pretty good together, though one was continually casting reflections upon the other as to their honesty and veracity.

That made no difference to Ralph, however; they were just the men to suit his purpose, and when he had told them of the large sum of money the Philadelphian had with him, they were perfectly willing to follow him up and run the chance of getting a share of it when the haul was made.

The haul had been attempted, but had proven rather disastrous to all three.

But Moorehouse and Happy did not show any signs of worriment over the way things had turned out.

"A whole skin is better than filthy lucre, anyway," is the way Happy expressed it.

"We kept on follerin' ther trail," he resumed, "thinkin' as how we might ketch some feller unawares an' take what he had from him, when all at once we seen ther tracks of a bear. We hadn't had any breakfast, so we follers ther bear, an' when we sees him, Happy, he shoots. Happy didn't do him much harm, but when I fired I brought him down, an' there he is. I'm awful glad we come across you, boss. How did you git away from Young Wild West an' his crowd?"

John Ralph quickly told them all about it.

They looked at him admiringly and made complimentary remarks during the recital of his adventures and escape.

"You're a dandy, boss!" exclaimed Happy.

"If I had only got that fellow's money I think I would call myself a dandy," was the reply.

"Well, there's more money 'sides that in ther world," observed Moorehouse.

"That is poor consolation."

"Ain't yer hungry, boss?" Happy questioned.

"Yes—almost starved."

"We'll make a fire an' cook breakfast, then. We've got all ther things we had with us, you know."

"Good! Hurry up and get the coffee made."

The two men were hustlers when it came to starting a fire and getting something to eat ready.

They went at it swiftly and systematically, and in a few minutes the odor of boiling coffee filled the mountain air in that vicinity.

Some bacon and biscuits made up the rest of the meal for Ralph, but Moorehouse and Happy were not satisfied with that alone; they cut off the ham of the slain bear, and salting some of the meat, filled with animal heat as it was, and proceeded to cook it.

"I don't care to eat that," said Ralph.

"What's ther difference?" said Moorehouse. "It gits warm when it starts to cook, don't it?"

"Oh, yes. But no meat should be eaten until the animal heat has entirely left it."

"Well, I reckon there won't be much animal heat left in this when we git ready to go at it," observed Happy with a grin.

"No; I suppose not. Go ahead and eat it; every one to his taste, you know. If you save a couple of slices of the bear I might like a bit of it for supper."

"Oh, we'll save it, you bet."

The sneak thief had managed to appease his hunger with the biscuits, coffee and bacon, and he now felt in his pockets for his pipe and tobacco.

He found them, for when he was captured nothing had been taken from him but his weapons.

When he had lighted his pipe Ralph began to think about those same weapons.

His companions each had a rifle, a bowie knife and a brace of revolvers.

They would no doubt let him have one of the revolvers, but he thought he would feel better if he had a rifle slung over his shoulder.

The two men joked as they ate their meal, and said complimentary things about their boss until at last he concluded that they would give him any of their weapons that he asked for.

But he had not been with that pair long enough to become thoroughly acquainted with them.

Since the scheme to rob the Philadelphian had failed they felt that Ralph no longer had any claim upon them.

They resolved that he should take his chances, just the same as any other strange dog.

The pair took their time about eating, and when they had finished and put the things away to resume their journey, John Ralph arose, and knocking the ashes from his pipe, said:

"Boys, I suppose I can have one of your rifles, and a pistol and a knife?"

Moorehouse and Happy looked at each other and then burst into a laugh.

"What!" cried the former; "you don't s'pose we're goin' to give up our shootin' irons an' knives, do yer? Why, they cost us money."

"Dave speaks ther truth, boss," Happy added hastily.

A shadow crossed the countenance of the boss.

"You are not going to let me travel along with you without any weapons, are you?" he questioned anxiously.

"You'll have to run ther chance of gittin' some, I reckon. It might be that we'll strike some one that'll have more than he wants in that line, an' then you kin fit yourself out. But as it is, I, for one, am goin' to hang right onto what I've got."

"Me, too, boss."

At this an angry look flashed from the man's eyes.

"What did I get you to come with me for?" he demanded.

"To follow up Young Wild West's Rough Riders an' help you rob ther feller what was supposed to have more money than brains," answered Happy promptly.

"That's it. Well, we haven't done it yet, have we?"

John Ralph had his wits at work now.

"No; I reckon we ain't," and then both men laughed.

"Well, that don't say that we won't. I mean to have that money, and I expect to divide it with you fellows. I got beat at my game this time, but I guess I will be able to show Young Wild West a thing or two before this trip is over. Now, the question is, are you going to stick to me?"

Moorehouse and Happy looked at each other in silence for a moment.

One was trying to read the thoughts of the other.

Happy was the one to make the reply.

"Well, you see, boss," said he, "I reckon we ain't got much of an idea that you'll ever git ther money from ther tenderfoot. We did have when we started with yer, but we've changed our minds now, ain't we, Dave?"

"Happy is tellin' what's so this time, boss."

"You think so, eh? Well, you just put me on the trail of those fellows, and I will guarantee that I will have that money before I quit. I won't do it by killing any one, either. I've got another disguise in my coat-tail pockets. I do my robbing business on the sly; I don't go in to hold anybody up, like most people out here do. I came within an ace of getting the tenderfoot's money; it was Young Wild West who awoke and caught me. Young Wild West will not be with him all the time, will he? He has not got enough sense to keep me from getting his money, and I am going to get it. Now, you fellows can quit me if you want to; but just give me one of the revolvers you have got and put me on the trail of the Rough Riders. I will give you all the money I have got in return for it."

This kind of talk put a new phase on matters.

Moorehouse and Happy simultaneously came to the conclusion that John Ralph was all right, after all.

After looking at each other for a moment, Moorehouse said:

"We'll take you an' show you ther trail, an' foller it with yer till we sight ther gang in camp to-night. Then you kin

go ahead an' try yer scheme, an' we'll settle on a place to meet after you've done it. We want to do ther right thing by yer, don't we, Happy?"

"Of course we do. I'll let you have one of my shooters, boss, an' you needn't pay me a cent for it."

Ralph breathed a sigh of relief.

He had won the men by his tact and coolness, and now he resolved to dupe them, in case he should get hold of the Philadelphian's money.

"I can see their game," he thought, as he took the revolver Happy tendered him and mounted his horse. "They would not hesitate to murder me and take the whole lot of money, so I'll just fix them if I get it."

Then he added aloud:

"I thought you people would not go back on me. I am a man who never stopped till he got what he was looking for, and I am not going to let up now till I get that pile of money that rich tenderfoot has got. Now, let us find the trail and keep at a safe distance behind Young Wild West and his Rough Riders. I am not going to allow a mere boy to beat me in this game, even if he did take in the first trick."

"That's ther way to talk, boss!" exclaimed Happy. "You are made out of ther right kind of stuff, an' that's what I told Moorehouse ther other day when we first set eyes on yer."

"That's what he did, boss; he's tellin' ther truth this time," Moorehouse assured him.

"I've got what might be called a couple of smart fools to deal with," thought Ralph. "Well, I'll show them how nice I will outwit them, that's all."

The three were now ready to go, so they set out on a sharp trot.

Moorehouse and Happy were pretty well experienced at traveling about in wild sections, and as they knew just what direction the Rough Riders took, they figured that they would not be long in finding the trail.

It was a little after noon when they struck it, and then Moorehouse said he was hungry, so they halted and started a fire in a little gully where there was water to be found and grass for their horses.

Happy was hungry, too, and so was John Ralph.

The latter even condescended to eat some of the bear meat now, and he said the animal heat was all out of it, and that it was good.

After a short rest they again set out.

The villainous trio kept it up till sunset without sighting the ones they were looking for, and then Happy said that the only thing they could do was to start out about an hour before daylight the next morning, as that would give them a chance to catch up a little.

This plan of action was agreed upon.

It was about an hour before sunrise when they set out, after eating a hurried meal.

They could not see the trail, to be sure, but they allowed the horses to have their way about it, knowing they would follow where others had gone.

CHAPTER VI.

THE ROSEBUD OF THE ROCKIES.

"Stop that!" thundered Young Wild West, as he leveled his revolver at the old man. "Drop that club, or I will send a bullet through your cowardly heart!"

The command coming to him so sudden, the old man took an involuntary step back, releasing his hold upon the girl as he did so.

Wild dashed up and came to a halt with Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart and Lancaster close behind him.

The rest of the Rough Riders showed themselves around the bend a couple of seconds later.

"What is the trouble, miss?" Wild asked.

"My uncle was going to beat me," she answered, drying the tears that had been streaming down her cheeks. "He is crazy, and I fear he has murdered my father."

At this the man, who looked as much like a demon as a human being in civilized clothing could, uttered a snarl and sprang toward her again.

She managed to get out of his way, and then our hero quickly dismounted.

"I told you to drop that club," he cried. "Now, drop it, or I will drop you!"

There was no mistaking what the boy meant, and the old fellow, whether he was sane or not, evidently thought it best to obey.

The club dropped to the ground with a thud, and then he folded his arms and looked defiantly at the band of horsemen that had come along just in time to save the girl from being injured, perhaps killed.

"Go 'way from here!" he snarled. "This is my property, an' you've got no right here."

"Oh, I guess we have got a right to come here," answered Wild, coolly. "Anyhow, we have got more of a right to come on this property than you have to strike the young lady with a club. Now, sir, I want you to give an account of yourself, and be quick about it."

"I won't!" was the snapping rejoinder. "Go on away, or I'll kill you all!"

"No; you wouldn't do that, would you?" and with a quick move, the boy seized him by the shoulders and flung him to the ground.

"Bring a rope here—quick!" he called out. "I have an idea that this fellow should not be allowed to run loose."

Lancaster was there with a lariat in double-quick time.

If the old man had not been crazy before he certainly was now, for only a madman could have exerted the strength that he showed.

He flung Wild from him with the greatest of ease, and then with a leap he was upon his feet and away through the scrub oaks like a flash.

Lancaster made an effort to catch him by lassoing him, but made a miserable failure of it.

A hoarse shout of defiance came from the mountainside and then all was still in that direction.

"He is in one of his wild moods again," sobbed the girl, "and he has gone away to some hiding place he has not far from this spot. He may not be back again in two or three days. Oh, I am so glad that you came here."

Her eyes were fixed upon Lancaster when she said this, and the young man blushed a deep crimson, for he saw that she was very beautiful, in spite of the common attire she wore.

"I assure you, miss, that you are no more glad than we are," he answered. "There is some mystery to all this; won't you kindly tell us what it all means? We shall be only too glad to escort you to a place of safety."

"Thank you for the offer, but I dare not leave this cabin," she answered, and then a shudder came over her. "I have lived here for seven years, because—because——"

"Because what, please?"

"Because my father was an innocent man."

This reply was a rather vague one, but a glance from Young Wild West told the Philadelphian not to question her further.

"You have no objection to our camping here for an hour or so?" asked Wild.

"No, no. I would be glad to have you do so," was the quick reply, while a happy light came in the girl's eyes.

"Dismount!" commanded the young leader of the Rough Riders, turning to his men. "This is as fine a spot as we could find the whole mountains over. We will cook our dinner here and take a rest."

"The balance of the day," added Lancaster, who was more than interested in the beautiful girl they had met under such strange circumstances.

He was smitten by her rare and innocent beauty, and, in fact, he had fallen in love with her.

The sixteen horses were soon tied where they could get at the luxuriant grass, and then the riders busied themselves in putting the camp in proper shape.

The girl watched them with a strange and eager light in her eyes.

"This is the first time I have seen so many people at a time in years," she remarked, turning to Lancaster. "It delights me, and at the same time it makes me sad, for I have been compelled to suffer the solitude of this place, along with my father, who was innocent of the charge they put upon him."

"Tell us your story, if you will, miss," said Wild. "It may be that we can help you."

She hesitated a moment, and then looking in the direction the madman had gone, she went in the house and brought out three rough, home-made chairs.

She placed them near the cabin door, and then our hero and the tenderfoot did not hesitate to sit upon two of them.

The rest of the party were busy a few yards off and did not seem to be paying much attention to them.

The beautiful mountain girl took the other chair and then remained silent, as though she dreaded to tell her story.

She acted as though there was something shameful attached to it.

"What is your name, if I may ask?" Young Wild West observed, knowing that she needed a little encouragement to go ahead.

"Rose Mallow is my name," she answered softly. "My poor father called me the Rosebud of the Rockies. I suppose he called me that because there were no other children in the Rocky Mountains hereabouts."

The last was spoken apologetically, as though she felt that she was unworthy of such a pleasing title.

"An appropriate nickname, I should say," said Lancaster. "Rosebud of the Rockies! Why, that sounds romantic. I am more pleased than ever, Wild, at coming on this trip."

"I am glad of it, Harrie. Now we had better introduce ourselves. Miss Mallow, this is Mr. Harrie Eugene Lancaster, of Philadelphia."

The girl bowed, showing that she knew what politeness and good manners were, even if she had been cooped up in the mountains for so long a time.

"And this is Young Wild West, the Prince of the Saddle and all-around hero, Miss Mallow," Lancaster added. "Our band here is what is known as Young Wild West's Rough Riders, and we are on a trip through the mountainous regions searching for adventure. Meeting you here has been one of the greatest adventures we have met with so far, though we did have some trouble with three thieves the night before last. I doubt if anything can happen on the trip that will exceed our present adventure, which I shall call the finding of the Rosebud of the Rockies."

The girl blushed and smiled alternately.

The ice had been broken now, and she proceeded to tell them all about herself, the substance of which was as follows:

Seven years before her father had taken her and her mother away from Denver very suddenly.

It was not till they had reached the seclusion of the Rocky Mountains that Rose, who was then ten years of age, learned what it all meant.

Her father had been accused of robbing a bank of which he was the cashier.

Everything pointed to his guilt, though he was innocent, she took pains to declare.

Rather than stand a trial and the disgrace he fled to the mountains with his wife and child and lived in dread, accumulating gold at the same time.

Two years after this happened the girl's mother died.

Then Rose set bravely at it to keep house in the little cabin for her father.

He had often impressed it upon her that if she ever returned to civilization after he was no more she must go under another name.

Things went along in their own way for four years more and the Rosebud of the Rockies was budding into womanhood.

Then she began to pine for the things she had known in her girlhood days.

But she loved her father devotedly, and was dutiful as a child could be.

She was determined to help him fight out his battle if she died there herself.

One day her father's brother came along and took up his residence with the two lonely residents of the mountainside.

How he had found them out she did not know, but she did know that he was not a welcome guest.

He was cross and crabbed, and had fits of madness at times, when he would quarrel fiercely with her father and twit him of his shame.

Then he would leave the cabin and be gone for days.

When he came back he would act like another man, and things would go along comparatively smooth until the next outburst happened.

A week before the timely arrival of the Rough Riders at the cabin door her father had disappeared.

The uncle, who was more sullen and morose than she had ever seen him, declared that he had gone back to Denver to prove his innocence of the crime that was laid at his door.

But Rose could not believe this, and when four days passed and her father had not come back, she openly accused the old man whom she called uncle of murdering him.

Then the old man had become crazed, though he did not offer to do violence to her at the time.

He scarcely appeared sane at all, but as she thought he was harmless, she did not fear him, but tried her best to get him to tell where her father was, if he had not killed him.

It was just before Young Wild West and his gallant band of horsemen came along that the crazed man had taken a different turn.

He became suddenly violent, and to escape his wrath the fair Rosebud of the Rockies ran screaming from the cabin.

Then she had been saved, as has already been described.

It was rather a remarkable story, but neither Young Wild West nor Lancaster doubted a word of it.

They felt very sorry for the girl, and they wanted to help her.

She declared she would never leave the cabin till she learned the fate of her father.

"We will try to solve the problem for you," said Wild, after he had thought for awhile. "I wouldn't put too much hope on his being alive, though it may be that he is. Crazed people take such sudden notions. You declare that your father was innocent of the crime charged to him; did you ever have a suspicion as to who the guilty party was?"

"Yes; I always thought my uncle was the guilty party."

"Ah, it looks that way, does it not, Wild?" exclaimed the tenderfoot.

"I am not prepared to say just now," was the reply. "But I will take it upon myself to inform Miss Mallow that we will stay here for a few days, and in that time if we don't find the secret hiding place of her crazed uncle and solve the mystery, my name is not Young Wild West!"

A thrill of joy shot through the frame of the beautiful Rosebud of the Rockies when she heard this declaration.

"I know you mean what you say," she said. "I thank you for your words. They make me feel better than I have since my poor father disappeared."

"If there is any one who can clear this up it is Young Wild West," Lancaster hastened to assure her. "I will stake my life on him any time!"

Wild was just going to say something when a hoarse yell rang out close at hand.

The madman was coming back.

CHAPTER VII.

A DASTARDLY CRIME.

When daylight overtook the three villains who were trying to catch up with Young Wild West's Rough Riders, they found themselves in a very wild part of the mountains.

The ground was hard and stony, and the trail made by those who had preceded them could not be seen at all.

They halted when the sun came up and John Ralph showed signs of great disappointment.

"They have slipped us, I guess," he said. "It is too bad! But I will find them, and I will get the tenderfoot's money, if it takes a month to do it!"

"We'll find 'em all right," Happy assured him. "They came this way, but we can't see their trail, that's all. Jest wait till we strike some soft ground; then it will be as plain as day."

"That's right, boss; Happy is tellin' ther truth," Moorehouse spoke up. "Our horses know enough to follow where ther others went. Don't git worried, now, 'cause if you git to worryin' too much you might git into a streak of bad luck that you won't git out of. Jest take it easy. That's ther way, ain't it, Happy?"

"Dave is right, boss. We'll find Young Wild West's gang all right, an' we won't be long in doin' it."

They were just about to go ahead when a horseman suddenly rounded an angle of the irregular path and came toward them.

He was a middle-aged man attired in a corduroy suit and top boots, and was armed with a rifle, revolver and hunting knife.

"Good-morning, strangers!" he called out as he came to a halt.

"Good-morning!" replied Ralph, politely. "What brings you this way alone?"

"What brings the three of you here, I might ask?" was the retort, while the gray eyes of the man twinkled.

"I can easily and quickly tell you that. I am on my way to Cheyenne City. I hired these two men to show me the way. It is a sort of pleasure trip, you see—the sort of trip I am not used to."

"Ah, well, since you have told me what you are doing here, I'll tell you my errand here. I am looking for a lone cabin somewhere around here. Haven't seen anything of it, have you?"

"No," retorted the three, shaking their heads and telling the truth.

"A lone cabin!" exclaimed Ralph. "Does any one live in it?"

"Yes, according to the information I received. A man lives in it who has been away from Denver for seven or eight years. He is a man I want to find, and when I do find him I have an idea that he will be the happiest man alive."

"Why, how is that?" questioned the sneak thief, becoming very much interested.

"Well, this man left Denver because he was branded as a bank robber," went on the stranger. "Two months ago it was discovered that he was innocent, and the bank officials immediately made an appropriation of fifty thousand dollars to be expended, if necessary, in finding the man and bringing him back to Denver."

"An' you're lookin' for that man?" observed Moorehouse.

"Yes; and if I find him I will make a neat thing out of it."

"You must have had some clew to bring you here in the mountains after your man," ventured John Ralph.

"I did. A brother of the man gave the clew, when he came out here a year ago. He is the man who had a hand in robbing the bank, and he threw the blame upon his brother. Then, I have reason to believe, after he thought his secret was in danger of leaking out, he sought out the brother to live a recluse with him. Of course that is only my theory, but I have learned enough since I have been in the mountains to make me feel convinced that my theory is correct. I have information from parties in the town of Martin Flats, forty miles below here, that the very people I want are living in a lone cabin somewhere in these parts."

"That's a rather strange case, I should say."

"Yes; it is a strange case, but I am used to such. I am a detective by profession, you see."

"I thought as much," and the sneak thief could not help wincing under the gaze of the man.

Like all other villains, he had a dislike for detectives, or any other officers of the law, for that matter.

He knew they had a way of reading pretty well what a man was.

It suddenly occurred to him that if the detective should happen to get a bullet in his heart in that lonely spot that the weapons he was equipped with would come in very handy for him.

This thought had scarcely flashed upon the villain than he whipped out his revolver and shot the man who was sitting on the back of his horse less than six feet from him.

The range was too close for him to miss, and with a groan the detective reeled from the saddle and fell to the ground.

"Great Rattlesnakes!" cried Dave Moorehouse, looking at the "boss" with distended eyes. "You're a dandy, you are."

"That's right, boss," spoke up Happy. "Dave has told ther truth for once in his life."

But the murderer paid no attention to the remarks.

He dismounted as soon as the body touched the ground.

Then the next minute he was appropriating the rifle and other weapons.

"Go through his clothes," he said to the two villains with him. "We will divide equally what there is to be found.

Here is your revolver, Happy. I've got one of my own now. Take off his coat and vest, too."

The men were thunderstruck at what happened, for, as bad as they were, they had never seen a more cold-blooded act committed, and it took their nerve from them temporarily.

But they obeyed the villain's command just as though he really was their boss.

They did this before they had time to sum up what had taken place.

Mechanically they went through the pockets, taking out everything there was in them.

About three hundred dollars in money was found, and a big pocket-book that contained several documents and papers that had a legal aspect.

"Each of you take a hundred," calmly observed the sneak thief. "I'll take what is left of the money and the pocket-book. Are you satisfied?"

"Yes, boss, we're satisfied," Moorehouse gasped.

"The fellow don't carry a watch, it seems. That is rather odd, isn't it?"

"Yes, boss; that's rather odd," and Happy scratched his head to try and get his nerve.

"Just toss the body over the cliff over there and give the horse a cut. A horse that belonged to some one else is bad property to be found with, you know, so we don't want the animal."

By this time the two men had recovered from the surprise the sudden shooting had brought upon them.

They looked at each other, and then turned to Ralph.

"You're what I call a putty cool hand," Happy remarked.

"I didn't know you was that kind of a man. Now, I reckon that since you was the one what shot ther feller, you kin be ther one what throws ther carcass over ther cliff. Ain't that right, Dave?"

"Yes, boss; Happy's right," retorted Moorehouse, looking straight at the sneaking scoundrel.

"Oh, all right. If you are afraid to do it, I'll throw the body over. Here goes!" and as the cliff was but a few feet distant the task was soon done.

But before he did it, he took the dead man's hat and laid it aside.

Then, as he walked back to his horse, he picked it up and tried it on.

It fit him as though it had been made for him, and without any hesitation he threw his own hat over the cliff, and then changing his coat and vest for those of the dead man, he threw what he did not want after the hat.

"Now, then, boys, I am the man what is looking for the lone cabin and the two brothers," he observed, calmly. "That is what I'll tell Young Wild West if I should run across him. I've got the other fellow's papers, you know, and by changing my looks a little with these things, I guess they won't know me."

As he finished speaking the villain placed his hand in his trousers pocket and drew forth a wig and beard.

Both were of a blond color.

"He beats ther deck, don't he, Happy?" exclaimed Moorehouse.

"That's right. Ther boss is ther greatest man I've seen since I left Cheesquake Creek nineteen years ago."

Ralph smiled.

He now thought he had got the men to fear him slightly and that was just what he wanted them to do.

But hé was mistaken in his men.

Moorehouse and Happy liked him less than ever now.

The foul crime he had committed was too much for them, as bad as they were.

They were simply waiting for the opportunity to fix him up, as they termed it.

They meant to relieve him of everything he had, and then turn him adrift in the same condition they had found him when they shot the bear the day before.

But they wanted him to get the money from the tender-foot first.

John Ralph mounted his horse, and they followed suit.

"Now let us find the trail of the Rough Riders as soon as possible," he said.

He had donned the wig, beard and hat, and his appearance certainly was changed remarkably.

They kept on riding for an hour, and then as they reached a patch of soft ground, they suddenly came upon the trail of the Rough Riders.

"I told yer so," cried Happy. "Here's ther trail!"

"I see it," retorted Ralph. "You were right. Now let us go on."

At a sharp clip they proceeded on, not noticing that the horse the detective had been riding was following them.

The riderless steed seemed to be doing it for want of company, but did not try to catch up with the other horses.

Ralph was now acting as though he was really the boss of the three, and Happy and Moorehouse suggested that they come to a halt and have dinner.

But Ralph said they had better keep on, as the trail showed signs of being fresher, and that they ought to soon sight the crowd they were looking for.

He was allowed to have his own way, and they kept on for another half-hour.

Then all of a sudden Happy caught sight of a column of smoke rising upward.

"I guess we have caught up to 'em," he remarked. "If that smoke don't come from a campfire I'll miss my reckonin'."

"That's jest what's ther matter," chimed in Moorehouse. "Boss, Happy is tellin' ther truth."

"I hope you are right," was the reply.

"I know we're right."

"Well, that smoke comes from a spot not so very far away from here. Suppose we halt here?"

"Jest as you say."

"And then I'll crawl over that way and see if it is the camp of the Rough Riders."

"That's it, boss."

"And if it is I will come back and tell you, and then we

will form some plan of action. We must have that pile of money the tenderfoot has, you know."

"That's right. It will pay us well for our trip, then."

"Well, you wait here with the horses, and I'll go ahead on foot, then."

"All right, boss."

All three dismounted, and then, after seeing that the horses were tied, John Ralph set out on his tour of inspection.

The place they saw the smoke coming from was less than a quarter of a mile away, and the two men sat down in a shady spot to await the murderer's return.

In about twenty minutes he came back.

"Well?" asked the two in the same breath.

"It is the camp of the Rough Riders," was the reply. "But that is not all. They are camped right by the lone cabin that fellow was looking for, and there is as fine a looking girl there as I ever saw."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CAPTURE OF THE MADMAN AND WHAT FOLLOWED.

Young Wild West got up from the chair and rushed out in the open to see where the madman was.

The next instant he saw him.

He was upon a bank about twenty feet above the level on which the cabin was built, and was even then in the act of hurling a big stone at the Rough Riders.

"Look out, boys!" called out Wild.

But they all saw him, and as the stone came whizzing downward, they jumped nimbly out of the way.

"Get out, you fiends! Get out, I say! I own this property, and I want you to get off. If you don't I'll kill you all!" yelled the crazed man.

"You just come down here, or I'll put a bullet through you!" our hero answered, and he leveled his rifle as though he meant to shoot.

But a hoarse laugh was all the answer he got, and then the madman disappeared from sight.

Wild ran around till he found a path to get up to the top of the bank, and then hastened to the spot where he had last seen the old fellow.

The briars and undergrowth were trampled down around the place, but just beyond it there was a lengthy strip of rock, from which three or four paths such as antelopes make branched in different directions.

There was little use in following either of the paths, for he was most sure to take the wrong one first, and then the madman would be in some safe hiding place.

"The only way to catch him is to use strategy," thought the boy, as he turned and came down he hill.

Cheyenne Charlie, Jim Dart and Jack Robedee were there to meet him.

"We was just comin' up there to help you find ther old feller," said Charlie.

"Let him go now. If he comes back again, which I think he will pretty soon, I have an idea that we will be able to catch him. The minute you fellows hear that yell of his I want you to run up that hill as fast as you can. That is, of course, if the yell comes from up there."

"We understand, I guess," answered Jim.

The Rosebud of the Rockies stood in the doorway of the cabin, waiting in an expectant manner, and when she saw the four coming back she turned to Lancaster with a sigh.

"I was in hopes they would catch him, but I suppose it is all right that they did not."

"Just leave it to Young Wild West. He will catch him, and if there is anything to be got out of him as to where your father is, he will get it from him."

The Rough Riders had been busy getting the noonday meal ready, and a few minutes later one of them came over and notified Wild that he could now take his choice of venison or bear steak, with the other fixings that went with them.

"Possibly I can help you out with your dinner," said the girl to Lancaster. "We have a large supply of provisions on hand, and I just baked a fresh batch of bread this morning."

"I am afraid your bread wouldn't go very far among sixteen hungry mortals, like we are," he replied with a laugh. "However, you might arrange it so we could have a slice apiece. Whatever the cost is I will gladly pay for it."

"You will pay nothing," was the retort, with an injured air. "One thing about my father was that he always had plenty of supplies in the line of eatables on hand. Why, we have three barrels of flour in the loft that have never been opened, and we have ham, bacon, pickles and preserves in abundance. We also have——"

"There, that will do, please!" cried the young man. "You are making my mouth water."

The fair Rosebud laughed and ran into the cabin.

She was as light-hearted as a fairy now, but when she began to think of her missing father she would be bound to grow dejected again.

"You will have to help me a little," she called out. "Just tell them to wait a minute."

"Wait, boys!" exclaimed Lancaster. "We've got something here to go with the dinner."

The Rough Riders got up and waited, while Bub Sprague, the ex-variety artist, started up a song about a girl he took to a fancy ball and the enormous quantity of what she ate and drank when they came out and went into a restaurant.

It was a comical song, and all hands laughed heartily as it progressed.

But before he had concluded it Lancaster came out, carrying a small tub of pickles.

The lid was off and the Rough Riders could see the appetizing dainties plainly.

Then everybody's mouth began to water.

After him came Rose Mallow with three monster loaves of freshly baked bread in her arms.

"This may be a treat for you and it may not," she said, blushing.

"A treat?" echoed Jack Robedee. "I reckon it'll be more than a treat! Pickles, boys! Jest think of it!"

The Rosebud of the Rockies was put cutting up the bread, and she managed to fix it so there were two big slices for each of them.

And the slices were thick ones, too.

After that she left them and went back into the cabin.

Many of the Rough Riders were willing to take an affidavit that they never sat down to a meal that they enjoyed so much, and all declared they had never eaten a better one.

They ate without being disturbed in the least, and when the last man had got up from where he was sitting on the ground and the pipes were going it was a pretty contented crowd.

Wild was just beginning to think that the old man had given up his idea of driving them away when all of a sudden the hoarse scream rang out again.

It came from the same place as it had the last time and instantly the four partners made for the place.

But before they reached the path to ascend the little hill a man came running down helter-skelter with the madman in hot pursuit.

Straight for the camp of the rough riders the man ran, and as he came our friends saw that he was decidedly of the blond type.

Both his hair and beard were decidedly yellow, and his face, which was almost as white as chalk from fright, made him look all the more like what he appeared to be.

It was John Ralph, as might be supposed. The villain had come back to try and get an opportunity to steal Lancaster's money, and while he was sneaking around the camp he had suddenly come upon the madman.

In his present make-up even Young Wild West failed to recognize him.

"Take him off!" yelled Ralph. "He's crazy!"

But our friends hardly heard what he said.

They saw their opportunity to capture the old man, and they lost no time in acting upon it.

Wild ran in front of him and very neatly tripped him.

Then he threw himself upon him, dodging the blow the old fellow made at him with the club he had in his hand as he did so.

Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart quickly ran to his assistance.

Then, between the three of them, they overpowered him and bound him with a lariat.

"I guess we've got you now, you measley coyote!"

The old man had ceased struggling as soon as he felt the rope being passed around his hands and body.

Suddenly he began crying like a child.

He was becoming rational again.

"It is all right, my friend," said Wild. "We are not going to harm you in the least, if you will tell us what has become of your brother."

"He's in the cave," was the ready reply. "I haven't hurt a hair in his head."

"Where is the cave? Tell us and be quick about it."

Our hero saw that a queer expression was coming over his face, and he anticipated that he was going to break out in one of his mad spells again.

And he was right, for instead of answering the question put to him, the old man uttered a fiendish yell and strove to break his bonds.

"I'll kill you all!" he shrieked. "Get away from here! Get away, I say!"

"We'd better tie him to a tree, I reckon," spoke up Cheyenne Charlie.

"Yes," answered our hero; "tie him fast till he gets sane again."

Lancaster now stepped over with Rose Mallow at his side.

"Did you learn anything from him?" the young man asked.

"Yes; we learned that the young lady's father is alive and unharmed in a cave somewhere. He told us that much, and then he broke into one of his crazy spells. That is good news for you, anyway, miss," he added, turning to the anxious girl.

"Yes, if it is only true," she hastened to reply, her face lighting up with joy.

"I think he was telling the truth when he said it. He also took pains to impress it on our minds that he had not harmed his brother in the least."

"Oh! if only it is true!" cried the Rosebud of the Rockies, fervently.

At this juncture John Ralph stepped up.

"I am Detective Benjamin, from Denver," he said blandly. "I am looking for one John William Mallow. Can any of you give me any information as to his whereabouts?"

At this Rose Mallow uttered a scream and fell fainting in the arms of Harrie Lancaster.

Young Wild West turned upon the intruder with flashing eyes.

"You get away from here as fast as your legs will carry you!" he exclaimed. "I don't like the looks of you!"

"But young man, I am a detective——"

"Never mind about that. Look what you have done! Gone and frightened the young lady into a fainting spell. Move, now, and be lively, or I'll fill you with lead!"

"But——" insisted the disguised villain.

Becoming exasperated, Wild sent a bullet from his revolver through the top of his hat, and then, being thoroughly frightened, the cowardly sneak took to his heels and ran from the camp like a deer.

Had they only known that he was the prisoner who had escaped from them the day before the Rough Riders would not have let him get away from them so easily.

But in the excitement none of them had looked at him closely, though there were those among them who marveled at his presence there alone and on foot.

Some water was brought from a neighboring spring and the girl was soon revived.

"Calm yourself," said Lancaster, tenderly. "There is no harm coming to you or your father, either. Be brave, now. I will protect you with my life, if necessary."

"He's in love with ther gal, I reckon," Jack Robedee whispered to Bub Sprague.

"I guess he is," was the reply.

The Philadelphian soon comforted the girl, and then he led her to the cabin.

"Don't you worry over what that man said," he went on. "He will never be allowed to bother you. Why, Young Wild West ordered him away while you were unconscious, and because he did not go fast enough he sent a bullet through his hat."

"Is that so?" she asked in surprise. "I am very grateful to you all, I am sure."

"Don't mention it."

"But I can't help saying it."

"You just keep up your courage now, and we will find your father for you, and then I have an idea that the mystery of the bank robbery in Denver will be cleared up so you can go back to your former home and enjoy living as you should."

"And if such a thing could happen where would you go?"

"Oh, I guess I would go to Denver, too."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Yes, I mean it. If I didn't go a pair of bright eyes would be haunting me as long as I lived."

The promoter of the band of Rough Riders was getting sentimental now, and he kept right at it.

He sat in the cabin near the doorway for more than an hour talking very earnestly to the Rosebud of the Rockies, and just before he got up to come out Bub Sprague was ready to make an affidavit that he saw him kiss her.

But be that as it may, Lancaster came out looking very happy.

The old man whom they had been compelled to tie to a tree to subject him had become silent long before this, and a few minutes after Lancaster came out of the cabin Rose appeared.

Noticing that her uncle was very quiet she walked up to him.

He looked at her half sullenly, half crestfallen.

"Uncle," said she, "where is father?"

He glared at her like a wolf at bay, but said never a word.

"Won't you tell me, uncle?" she pleaded. "It will be the best for us all if you do."

This time he shook his head and burst into a laugh.

"Who robbed the bank?" he cried, tauntingly. "Who ran away from his home and came to live in the mountains away from every one else?"

"You did!" exclaimed Young Wild West, darting before the old man so suddenly that he was taken completely by surprise. "Now, if you don't tell where your brother is, you will be taken back and tried for the crime."

Our hero hoped this would have the desired effect, but it did not.

Instead it set the man in another fit of madness, and he fairly frothed at the mouth.

"There is only one thing to do, and that is to set him free the next time he becomes quiet. Then we can follow him and see where he goes."

Wild said this in a whisper to Cheyenne Charlie.

It was not long before the old man became quiet.

But when Wild got around to see the whites of his eyes he could easily tell that he was not in his right mind, not by any means.

He concluded to wait awhile.

It was well toward the close of the afternoon that he thought he was in about the right condition to let go.

Then he walked up to him and said:

"Mr. Mallow, I bear you no grudge whatever, and therefore, as leader of this party, I am going to let you go where you will. I have seen enough of you to know that you are troubled with your head, and I think if you were to go somewhere and remain quiet for a day or two you would come around all right."

The old fellow looked at him in a dazed way, and just the least tinge of a kindly light shone in his eyes for an instant.

Then Wild severed his bonds and set him free.

The madman straightened up and looked around him for a moment, and then made a bolt for the little path that led up to the bank above.

Young Wild West waited till he had disappeared in the shrubbery, and then he started after him, followed by Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

Jack stayed back, because he was no good at running with his cork leg.

Wild reached the top of the bank in time to see the form of the old man disappear in the path that ran from the center of the flat rock.

He did not call out to those following which path to take, for fear he would startle the old man and make him hide.

He simply ran as light-footed as he could down the path.

It was a very crooked one, and he found that he could not proceed with any degree of speed.

But he kept right on, however, and at the end of a couple of minutes he could hear the footfalls of the fleeing madman not far in advance of him.

Then he kept right along, remaining at about the same distance behind him.

The path ran through mazes and labyrinths, being broken at intervals by open spots of rocky ground.

Suddenly it ran into a dense thicket, and as Wild turned an angle he saw the old man come down to a walk and move in a crouching attitude toward what seemed to be a solid wall of rock.

The next instant he disappeared from view entirely.

But the boy was not to be cheated that way.

He kept right on, and soon came to the place where he had last seen him.

Wild crouched to the ground and carefully looked about him.

He had a strong idea that he was near the cave the madman had spoken about.

He determined to wait.

It was impossible for any one to go more than twenty feet

ahead in the direction the old fellow had been running, since the path led to a narrow ledge that ended in nothing.

For fully five minutes our hero remained in a crouching position.

He listened but could not hear a sound.

Then he got up, determined to make a thorough investigation of the place.

He had scarcely got upon his feet when a figure bounded from behind a clump of shrubbery and dealt him a blow on the back of his head.

Though it proved to be but a glancing blow, it stunned him temporarily, and he dropped to the ground like a log.

Then a man dropped upon him and quickly thrust a wad of leaves in his mouth and bound a handkerchief about it.

In twenty seconds more he had pinned the boy's arms to his sides by winding a rope tightly about his body.

This was no more than done when Young Wild West opened his eyes.

His senses had returned to him, and he realized what was going on thoroughly.

"Well, I guess I have got you, Young Wild West," a voice hissed close to his face, and looking up, he saw the face of the blond man who had claimed to be a detective bending over him.

CHAPTER IX.

WILD'S PECULIAR ADVENTURE.

"You get up and come along with me!" went on the man with blond hair and beard. "If you don't I'll blow your head off and have done with it!"

Young Wild West became as cool and collected as he had been before the sudden attack upon him as these words grated in his ears.

The muzzle of a revolver was staring him right in the face now, and he knew that it was best for him to obey.

So he made a move to get up, and seeing that he did this, his captor helped him to his feet.

"I guess you don't know who I am," said the man in a whisper. "I had better show you; then you may feel easier."

He lifted the false beard he wore as he spoke and disclosed the features of John Ralph.

Wild would have said something just then, but as he was effectually gagged, he could not.

He simply did as the villain wanted him to and allowed him to lead him off to the right and down a descent.

When they were half-way down into a ravine our hero heard the voice of Jim Dart calling him from a point off to the left!

He could not answer to save his life, and his captor chuckled gleefully when he noted the effort he made to cry out.

"You kept me from robbing the tenderfoot the other night; now I am going to get square with you," he said in a hoarse whisper.

Through dense patches of brambles and over sharp stones Wild was forced to go, his captor clutching him tightly by the arm with one hand and keeping him covered by his revolver with the other.

He stumbled every now and then as though by accident, making as much noise as he could, so his friends would hear it and come that way and investigate, if they were close enough.

But it seemed that they were not, for when he had been marched along for nearly half a mile he suddenly saw a camp in a gully right before him with two men sitting on the ground in the shade of a tree, smoking and taking things easy.

They sprang to their feet when they saw that a prisoner was being brought in, and stared in amazement when they saw it was Young Wild West.

"Do you see who I have got, boys?" Ralph asked triumphantly.

"It's Young Wild West!" gasped Happy, for it was he.

He and Moorehouse were waiting for their "boss" to get hold of that money of the tenderfoot's, and they were taking things coolly about it.

"Great snappin' turtles!" cried Moorehouse. "Where did you git him, boss?"

"Oh, I caught him napping," was the rejoinder. "I thought I had better bring him along. He might be of some use to us, you know."

"Yes, he might," and Happy shrugged his shoulders.

"Happy is right—he might," added Moorehouse, following the example of his son-in-law. "What are you goin' to do with him, boss?"

"You know what I did to the detective, don't you?"

"I reckon I do; don't you, Happy?"

"Oh, yes; I know," was the reply.

"Tell us how you got Young Wild West," said Moorehouse, as Ralph forced our hero to sit on a fallen tree beside the two men.

"It was easy enough. I was hanging around the bushes not far from the cabin and the Rough Riders' camp when the crazy man I was telling you of came running along with Young Wild West not far behind him. I don't know where the crazy man went; I had eyes only for this fellow just then."

"An' you got him, didn't yer?"

Moorehouse looked at our hero curiously as he said this.

Wild met his gaze and noticed that the expression of the man's eyes was not at all antagonistic to him.

It was one of respect more than anything else.

He would have liked to have said something to the two rough-looking fellows just then, but the gag prevented him from doing it, so he was compelled to take what was coming without being able to say a word that might excite the pity of the men.

Wild felt pretty sure that John Ralph meant to kill him.

He could tell by the cold, fiendish look in his eyes.

It was a sort of a little glade that the three had pitched their camp in.

Thick bushes and stunted trees surrounded it on every

side except the place where Ralph had come in with his prisoner.

"Boys," said the sneak a minute later, "I am going to show you something. I am going to show you how straight I can shoot."

"What are you going to do?" demanded Moorehouse.

"I am going to step off ten paces and see how close I can come to putting out the eyes of Young Wild West in two shots!" was the rejoinder. "You fellows had better get up from there; I might shoot a little wild, you know."

"So you are goin' to try it at ten paces, are yer?" queried Happy, as he got up.

"You are goin' to shoot Young Wild West while he is settin' there on that log with his hands tied an' his mouth stuffed with leaves, so he can't say a prayer afore he dies?"

"That is just what I'm going to do, Happy."

"No, you ain't!"

"That's right!" exclaimed Moorehouse. "You ain't goin' to do it. Happy's tellin' ther truth this time, boss."

A scowl came over the face of the cowardly villain.

He did not just know what this attitude of the men meant.

He had been of the opinion that they feared him ever since he had shot the detective, but now he began to have a shade of doubt about it.

He had placed his hand on his revolver when he said he was going to shoot at our hero.

He still had it there when the two men opposed what he was going to do.

Neither of them had their hands near their belts.

John Ralph looked at them in silence for a moment, and then exclaimed:

"Fools! do you mean to say that you do not want me to put the greatest enemy of men like you are in the West out of the way?"

"We didn't say that," spoke up Moorehouse. "But we do say that you ain't goin' to kill him while he has got ther leaves stuffed in his mouth so he can't talk. Give ther boy a chance to say his prayers; ain't that right, Happy?"

"Yes, Dave; that's right. Take ther gag out of his mouth an' give him a chance to say his prayers afore he dies, boss."

"Pooh!" sneered Ralph. "As if you fellows believed in saying prayers!"

"We used to, though; didn't we, Happy?"

"That's right, boss."

"An' if I thought I was goin' to shuffle out of ther pack in a few minutes, you kin bet yer life I would want to say my prayers now, an' say 'em real hard."

The cold-blooded villain laughed harshly at what the men said.

"You needn't laugh," said Moorehouse, testily. "Since we've got to talkin' about sayin' prayers things that happened long ago have come before me like a flash. I 'member ther time when I was a little boy an' had a mother. She was a good mother, too, an' I think if she'd lived I'd have been an honest man, afraid to face no man. This mother of mine used to make me git down on my knees every night

afore I went to beat his own. I'd say ther prayer she learned me to say. It went like this; 'Now I lay me——'

"Shut up, you fool!" roared Ralph. "Don't talk such nonsense to me."

"What Dave says is right, boss," spoke up Happy, his face as solemn as an owl.

"Well, whether it is right or wrong, Young Wild West don't get a chance to say his prayers, unless he says them to himself!"

The villain stepped back and raised his revolver.

But before he could get the weapon on a line with the form of the helpless boy, Moorehouse knocked it from his hand.

"I reckon it's about time you came down a peg or two; ain't that right, Happy?"

"He's right, boss. You've been going it a little too high since you shot ther detective. Jest stand still now; don't try to run away, 'cause if you do you'll be apt to fall down an' hurt yourself. There! That's ther ticket! Stand right there. Now, Dave, what do you say if we untie Young Wild West an' let him have it out with our boss?"

"Jest ther thing!" cried Moorehouse, slapping his hands together to show how delighted he was at the idea.

"Well, you jest cut him loose, while I keep Mister Ralph covered so he won't run away. You might ask Young Wild West to promise not to bother us if we let him loose; you kin take ther gaff out of his mouth first."

The taller of the two men, who had learned a lesson from traveling with a scoundrel who was a hundred per cent. worse than they were, walked over and removed the gaff from our hero's mouth.

"Thank you," said Wild, coolly, as soon as he could speak.

"You're welcome, sir," retorted Moorehouse, promptly and politely.

"You may go ahead and untie me. I promise you that you and Happy shall not be interfered with by any of my men or myself."

"Do you mean that, Young Wild West?"

"Yes; I mean it. I never say a thing I do not mean."

"Well, Happy, I'm going to cut him loose."

"All right," was the rejoinder; "let her go!"

A couple of strokes of the knife Moorehouse had and the rope dropped from our hero.

"I will take charge of your friend!" he exclaimed, walking up to Ralph.

"All right," answered Happy. "Jest sail into him an' give him what he deserves. We don't care if you kill him; do we, Dave?"

"Nope," was the reply. "If ever a man deserved to be done away with, it's him. I can't git over it about how he shot that detective while he was talking to him friendly like. Jest give it to him hard, Young Wild West."

Wild was just in the humor to give the villain a thrashing, and he went right at it.

"Look out for yourself, you treacherous sneak!" he cried, and then he struck Ralph a blow in the face with his fist.

He staggered back from the effects of it, and then, with an oath, attempted to draw his knife.

Biff!

Again did Young Wild West hit him, this time sending him in a heap to the ground.

"Get up!" called out the young Prince of the Saddle. "Get up and take your medicine, for I am not through with you yet. You have got a whole lot more coming!"

Ralph staggered to his feet.

He was going to fight now, like any coward will when cornered.

But he had a hopeless chance of winning.

The boy with the dark, flashing eyes who stood before him, had thrashed many a villain who was not what might be called a coward.

And he was going to thrash him, just as sure as he stood there.

As Young Wild West moved toward him Ralph struck at him with both hands.

But before he realized that neither blow landed he received a swing on the jaw that sent him to the ground unconscious.

"I suppose I can go now," the boy observed, turning to the two men, who were enjoying the scene immensely.

"You kin bet you kin, Young Wild West!" cried Moorehouse. "You have won your liberty, I reckon."

"That's right," chimed in Happy. "Don't think too hard of us 'cause we ain't been jest ther kind of fellers we oughter be. We might do better after this; you can't tell, kin yer, Dave?"

"Nope! Yer can't tell—that's right. John Ralph has done more to make me think than any man ever did afore. I never knowed there was sich a bad man as he is."

"If you are tired of his company, and feel as if you want to start life anew, come over to our camp with me."

The men shook their heads.

"Wait a while," Moorehouse said. "We want to give this feller a little more rope, so's he'll hang himself. You will see him ag'in afore long, I'm sartin of it. We're jest goin' to let him go till he fetches up, ain't we, Happy?"

"That's right, Young Wild West!" Happy exclaimed, nodding to our hero.

"All right. I am going now."

Wild walked rapidly from the spot.

He felt that he should have brought John Ralph to the camp with him, but he did not know how the other two men would take to such a proceeding.

They were armed, and he was without a weapon.

He thought it best to let it be as it was for the present, though he really thought the two rough fellows were sincere in what they said.

They had given him his liberty, anyway, and when death was staring him right in the face.

Young Wild West had not proceeded more than half-way back to the camp when he saw Cheyenne Charlie and Bub Sprague coming toward him.

They uttered a whoop when they saw him.

"We've been huntin' all over for you!" Charlie cried. "What happened to you, anyway?"

"Oh, I had quite an experience. I came mighty near going under."

"You did? Tell us how."

"Well, I chased the madman till he disappeared in some unaccountable way, and then while I was peeping around and listening to locate him, I was hit on the head and dazed. When I got so I could think again I found myself bound and gagged."

"What!" cried the scout in astonishment.

"That's just what happened. Well, to make a long story short, it was the blond man we drove out of the camp who had me; and he proved to be no other than John Ralph, the fellow who tried to rob Lancaster."

"Gee-whizz!"

"He forced me to come with him to a place back here. I had to come, you know, because he had a revolver at my head, and I could tell by the looks of his eyes that he would not hesitate to drop me. The two men who were with him when he came to our camp the other night were waiting for him back there, and they took a notion to save my life just as he was going to shoot me while I sat on a log, bound and gagged."

"Good for them!" exclaimed Bub Sprague. "There's more good in them fellers than I thought."

"That's so," Charlie assented. "But what happened then, Wild?"

"One of them knocked the shooter from Ralph's hand, and then they agreed to let me loose and give me a chance to fight the scoundrel. They took the gag from my mouth, and when I promised them I should not bother them, or that my men should not, either, they let me at him."

"An' did he show fight?"

"Not until I hit him twice; then he struck at me and missed, and I knocked him out."

CHAPTER X.

THE ROSEBUD'S FATHER IS FOUND.

Wild told Charlie and Bub all that had happened as they walked back to the camp.

The two were for going back and taking John Ralph a prisoner, but the boy said no.

He felt duty bound to let things go as Moorehouse and Happy wanted them.

When they came in sight of the camp near the cabin they found that there were only two or three of the men to be seen there.

The rest were out searching for Wild.

Charlie drew his revolver and fired two shots in the air.

"That's ther signal to show that you've been found," he said. "I forgot about it before."

All of the searchers were within hearing of the shots, it seemed.

They came in one by one, and soon all were there.

Wild did not give a full account of what had happened to him to all of them.

He did not want to get theolph hagered too much.

Some of them might take a trip to the camp of the three, and then something might happen to Moorehouse and Happy.

That would not be keeping his word.

He told Jim, Jack and Harrie Lancaster.

The Philadelphian spent more than half his time at the cabin with the Rosebud of the Rockies.

He seemed to be the only one who could comfort her.

It was pretty near dark when our friends got back to the camp, so Wild felt that they would have to put off the search for the madman till the next morning.

He walked over to the cabin and told the girl to lock herself in as she usually did, promising her that they would renew the search for her father as soon as daylight came.

The Rosebud was very hopeful, and thanked him for his encouraging words.

It was a fine spot to camp in, as had been said before, and the Rough Riders took things contentedly.

After supper they told stories, sang songs, played cards and amused themselves till a late hour.

Wild thought it best to place four men on guard, so he did so.

The night passed smoothly enough till about four in the morning.

It was just getting daylight when one of the guards saw the form of a man crawling toward the cabin door.

He at once fell upon him and made him a prisoner.

It was not the madman, though the man fought like a demon to get away.

But when he felt the muzzle of a revolver pressed against his temple he gave in.

The guard thought it best to take him before the leader of the Rough Riders at once.

He sent word by another guard, and Wild West was aroused.

When our hero gazed at the prisoner, he gave a start of surprise.

It was not the madman, but the face bore a strong resemblance to his.

He was bare-headed, coatless, and looked to be half starved.

"Do not be alarmed, my friend," said Wild, speaking kindly to him. "I hope you have nothing to fear from us. We are honest people, and I take from your looks that you are the same."

"Yes; I am honest," was the reply. "But there are those who think I am not."

"Well, perhaps they will not think that way very long. You are John William Mallow, I presume?"

"Yes; that is my name."

"I thought so. Your daughter told me about you, and we have been trying to find you nearly all day."

"Yes, I know. You are the young man who chased the crazy man to the cave, and then could not find it?"

"Yes."

"Well, the crazed man is dead. He was my brother."

"He is dead, then?"

"Yes; he died by his own hand. But give me something to eat, won't you. I am nearly famished."

"Yes; don't say any more. I will see that you have a cup of coffee and something to eat right away."

Our hero told the man to sit down on a stump that was near and then gave him a blanket to throw over his shoulders, for the fresh mountain air was decidedly chilly.

It was now light enough for Wild to see what he was about, and in a few minutes he had replenished the smoldering fire and had a coffee-pot on.

The guard stood by the man meanwhile, and Wild thought it best to leave him there, as he did not know what sort of a notion Mallow would take.

While the coffee was brewing the young dead-shot awakened Cheyenne Charlie and Jim Dart.

"Come," said he; "get up. The father of the Rosebud of the Rockies is here!"

Of course they were much surprised when they heard this.

They got up right away, and when they saw the man sitting on the log, Charlie suggested that they wake Lancaster.

"Yes," said Wild. "I forgot about him. He is interested in this case more than any one else, I guess."

The young man was not as easily aroused as the others had been.

He was not used to roughing it on the mountains and plains, and when he once got asleep he generally slept soundly.

But they got him up after awhile and made him understand what had happened.

When he came up to the fire he found Mallow eagerly drinking coffee from a tin cup and devouring a biscuit and a chunk of cold bear meat.

No one bothered him till Wild thought he had eaten enough for the present.

Then, though he was anxious to hear his story, he concluded that the best thing to be done was to arouse the girl in the cabin and receive the story from her later on.

"Harrie," said he, calling the tenderfoot aside, "go and knock on the door of the cabin and arouse Miss Mallow. When she comes to the door tell her in as nice a way as you can that her father is here. You know how to do it, I guess."

"Yes," was the reply. "I will break the good news gently to her."

He quickly went over to the cabin and gave the knock.

There was an answer almost immediately, showing that the Rosebud was either up or had not been sleeping very soundly.

In a few minutes the door opened, and then Harrie broke the news to her.

While he was talking to her, Wild led her father to the door.

She at once fell weeping into his arms.

"Rose! Rose!" they heard him whisper. "I am cleared of the stain at last. Oh, that your mother could have lived to know this!"

Our friends turned away.

They felt that it was no place for them just then.

It was nearly two hours later when Rose and her father came out of the cabin.

The girl looked radiant, and was attired in her best, while the old man wore a mountaineer suit and his hair and beard were combed out neatly.

Lancaster ran to the cabin and brought out a couple of chairs for them and they sat down, while Young Wild West's Rough Riders gathered around to listen to the story they knew was coming.

Briefly the story was as follows:

When the madman disappeared from the gaze of Young Wild West he had lifted a curtain of vines and entered a cave that was behind an angle of rock.

In the cave was his brother, who was bound and tied to a stake in the ground.

John William Mallow had been there ever since he disappeared from the cabin, and it had been very little that his crazed brother had given him to eat during that time.

When the brother entered the dimly lighted cave the captive noticed that the light of madness had entirely gone from his eyes.

"John," said he, huskily, "I have come to tell you something, and then I am going to let you go!"

This news was electrifying to John, as might be supposed.

"I am glad that you feel better," was all he said, for he felt that it might not be good to say too much just then.

"Yes," went on the madman, whose name was Henry, "I have come to tell you that it was I, with the help of two others, who robbed the bank in Denver. I fixed it so it would be laid to you, John, and that is what has driven me out of my mind. They know you are innocent, John, and it is I who is the hunted man now. The names of the two who helped me are Ben Scannell and George Tufts. They are no doubt serving time in prison now, while I am here to tell you the good news before I die. John, there are those outside who will take you back to Denver and see to it that you are duly exonerated of the blame of robbing the bank. I know they are such, for I could read their faces. One of them, a mere boy, who is the leader of the party, is even now outside searching for this cave. He will find it in a few minutes, so I will now die. Good-by, John. I won't ask you to forgive me, for that would be too much!"

Then the madman drew a knife and plunged it into his heart.

He fell dead at the feet of the brother he had wronged, and realizing that he was in the presence of death, and still unable to move from the spot, John fainted.

It was a long time that he lay in that faint, for his weakened condition did not permit him to recover quickly.

But when he did become conscious the faint light of early morning came through the hanging vines, and when it all came to him he arose to a sitting posture.

The body of his brother lay right before him and the knife was sticking in the breast.

It was a ghastly sight, but nerved to desperation, John Mallow saw a way for him to escape from his prison.

That bloody knife must save him.

He leaned over till his mouth touched the hilt of the knife.

Then he closed his teeth upon it and drew it forth.

This much done he bent his head and began sawing at the rope that held him fast.

It was awkward work, but the thought of life and liberty caused him to keep at it.

In five minutes he was free.

Leaving the blood-stained knife and body in the cave, he hastened for the cabin he had lived in so long.

When he saw the cabin of the Rough Riders his nerve failed him, and he strove to reach the door unseen.

The rest the reader knows.

It was a strange story, and the Rough Riders, who had listened intently to the recital, earnestly hoped that he would soon get back to Denver with his daughter and be restored to the good name he had borne before the bank robbery had been committed.

The Rosebud introduced her father to the Rough Riders, Wild calling off their names for her.

Then they went to look at the grave of her mother and wept over it together.

While they were gone two men came riding up to the camp, and as our hero looked at them he saw that they were Moorehouse and Happy.

"Come on; don't be afraid!" he called out, when he saw that they acted hesitatingly.

At this they came forward and dismounted.

"We thought we'd come an' tell yer that we've took John Ralph's shooters from him an' started him off to shift for himself," Happy remarked.

"Does he know the way to civilization?" Wild asked.

"I reckon he don't," spoke up Moorehouse.

"Didn't I hear you fellows say that he shot a detective?"

"Yes, he did, too. It was ther worst thing I ever seen done, wasn't it, Happy?"

"Dave's right, boss," exclaimed Happy.

Wild thought a moment, and then it struck him that perhaps the slain detective had been looking for the Mal-low brothers, since Ralph had made a remark to that effect when he was there.

"Do you know who the detective was looking for?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Moorehouse. "He was looking for that cabin."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

"He was looking for this cabin?" echoed Young Wild West, looking hard at the two men.

"Yes. Wasn't he, Happy?"

"That's right, Young Wild West; he was lookin' for this very cabin. He wanted to find a man who was innocent of doin' somethin', he said."

Our hero now questioned the two, and they told all that had happened when they had met the detective.

"Them papers might be of some use to you, I reckon," said Moorehouse.

"I reckon they would," exclaimed the boy. "Wait till I get my horse. I want you to put me on the trail of John Ralph."

"That'll be an easy thing to do. He won't git far away, anyhow, for he don't know nothin' about follerin' a trail. He kin hardly tell one when he sees it."

Young Wild West was not long getting his horse.

"Come," he said to Moorehouse. "Your partner can stay here till we get back."

"All right, Young Wild West."

The two men left the camp, Moorehouse in the lead.

He followed the trail that could be seen here and there till he came to the spot where the three had been in camp, Wild following close behind him.

"You say you took his weapons from him; what did you get when you took them?" our hero asked.

I got just what he took from the detective after he killed him," was the reply.

"Then you did not get those he took from me?"

"By jingo, we didn't! We never thought he had 'em."

"Well, he must have had my two revolvers and knife somewhere. It is not at all likely that he threw them away."

"No, he wouldn't do that. No wonder he didn't appear to be much worried when we told him to shift for himself. He told us he would git square with us, but we only laughed at him."

At that moment the crack of a revolver sounded close at hand, and a bullet cut a lock of hair from the head of Moorehouse.

"That's him now, I'll bet a plug of bacca!" exclaimed the man, raising his rifle and looking wildly about.

"Yes, that's him. Don't shoot;" and then Young Wild West called out in a ringing tone:

"Halt! Hold up your hands! If you don't I'll drop you dead from the saddle!"

The eyes of Moorehouse wandered in the direction our hero was looking, and he saw John Ralph and his horse through a break in the bushes.

The sneak thief and murderer stopped his horse and raised his hands as he was commanded to do, and as he looked at the man, who was but a coward, after all, a sneer curled the lips of Moorehouse, while a dangerous glitter shone in his eyes.

"He tried to shoot me, did he?" he muttered under his breath. "Well, I reckon he won't linger in this here world many hours more. When Young Wild West gits through with him I'll jest—well, I'll——"

His meditations were cut short just then, as Young Wild West rode forward to capture the scoundrel.

He followed, and was only too glad of the opportunity to seize the man he had called boss and bind his hands behind him and tie his ankles with a rope that he passed under the horse's belly.

The face of the prisoner was as pale as death, but he had not lost the use of his tongue.

"So you followed me up, after all, you hound!" he hissed.

"Yes, boss, I followed you up; I done it because Young Wild West wanted to see you before he went away. You had his shooters and knife, which is somethin' me an' Happy didn't think of when we sent you off to go it alone."

At this the villain began to rave and swear at a great rate.

"You went back on me, you hound!" he cried. "Oh, but I wish my aim had been true, and I had shot you dead when I fired a little while ago!"

"I'll tell yer why me an' Happy went back on yer, if yer want to know."

"You can't tell me why. You could not give a reason if you tried."

"Oh, yes, I kin, boss. We went back on yer 'cause we found that you was about ther worst feller we had ever met. When you killed that poor detective in such a treacherous fashion we was putty near paralyzed with s'prise. I made up my mind then that I'd been a putty bad feller in my time, but I thought that there was a chance for me to reform and do better; 'cause I wouldn't have done what you did, not if I thought I was goin' to make a million dollars. Shootin' a man is all right when you have to do it to save yourself from bein' shot, or to do it to git square, but to drop a man while you're talkin' to him in a friendly way jest to git his shooters an' some of his clothes—well, that's ther worstest thing I ever seen."

"You—you—you——" sputtered Ralph.

"Come on!" commanded Wild. "You can finish the discussion in the camp."

"All right, Young Wild West," answered Moorehouse. "I'll bring ther skunk in."

He took the bridle rein of the villain's horse from our hero's hand and started for the camp of the Rough Riders. Wild let him go on ahead and rode leisurely after him.

They were not long in getting back to the camp.

Cheyenne Charlie and the rest were standing about expectantly.

"Yer got him, I see," observed Happy, stepping forward.

"Yes, Happy, we've got him, ain't we, Young Wild West?" said Moorehouse.

"Yes, we have got him," retorted Wild, smiling at the man's way of talking.

"An' did yer find ther papers on him?" queried Happy.

"We haven't searched him yet. That is something we will now do."

The rope was untied from the prisoner's feet, and then Moorehouse pulled him from the back of his horse, letting him strike the ground in no gentle manner.

"Jack," said Wild to Robedee, who was standing near, "just go through this fellow and see what you can find in his pockets."

Jack stepped forward and relieved the villain of everything he had about him.

One of the first things he came across was the big pocket-book that had belonged to the unfortunate detective.

Wild took this from Jack and opened it.

The legal-looking documents were soon removed from it, and then our hero suggested to Harrie Lancaster that they go inside the cabin and look them over.

He called Charlie, Jim and Jack to follow, and then motioned the Rosebud of the Rockies to lead the way with her father.

The girl did so.

The little table was brought to the center of the room, and when the old man and his daughter were seated Young Wild West began glancing over the documents.

He picked out three, and handed them to Lancaster to read aloud:

One was a signed statement of the officials of the bank declaring John William Mallow to be innocent of the charge against him; one was a warrant for the arrest of Henry Mallow, and the other was a plea from nearly a hundred citizens whom John William Mallow had known and associated with in by-gone days to come back to Denver.

When the reading of the documents was done with the old man was silently weeping, while his daughter held his head on her shoulder.

The Rosebud's eyes sparkled joyously.

She was so happy that she could not speak.

Young Wild West motioned for his partners to follow him outside.

Lancaster remained right there.

As soon as the three were left alone in the cabin the young Philadelphian took the girl's hand and said:

"My pretty Rosebud, I want to ask you a question in the presence of your father. May I proceed?"

"Yes," she answered, in a low whisper, while her drooping eyelids told plainly that she knew only too well what was coming.

Her father raised his tear-bedimmed eyes expectantly.

"Will you be my wife, Rosebud? You are the only girl I ever let my heart go toward. I have known you but a few short hours, but I feel I cannot live without you. Don't say no! I want to go back to Denver with you and see your father installed into his old position among those who know him. What say you, my own Rosebud of the Rockies?"

For an answer to this stirring appeal she put out her hands, and the next moment Lancaster was clasping her to his breast.

John William Mallow looked on and smiled through his tears.

"This is the happiest day of my life!" he exclaimed, fervently. "My children, I bless you! Mr. Lancaster, I have not known you more than a few short hours, but I feel that you are all that is good and noble. My daughter loves you—I can see that. Take her and make her happiness complete. I have jealously cooped her in this wild place for so long that I am ashamed of myself, but I now feel that it has not been for naught. Oh, if——" and he broke into sobbing.

The young lovers knew what he was thinking of.

It was the flower-bedecked grave on the hillside, where the earthly remains of his once loving helpmate slept on, and would sleep through eternity and till Time was no more.

When the three came out of the lone cabin on the mountainside a few moments later they were just in time to see Young Wild West untie the hands of John Ralph and hand him a revolver and knife.

"Go!" they heard the young Prince of the Saddle say. "You are not fit to live, and you are certainly not fit to die! Go to the farthest ends of the earth, and may your memory always be haunted by the evil deeds you have committed. Go!"

He gave the horse a cut with a whip, and as the animal dashed away Ralph turned as quick as a flash and discharged his revolver at the boy.

Then three shots rang out as one, and as Cheyenne Charlie saw that Young Wild West had not been hit by the scoundrel's bullet, he said, grimly:

"Moorehouse an' Happy fired ther same time I did, but I reckon it was me what found his black heart."

There is little more to add to the story of Young Wild West's Rough Riders; or, The Rosebud of the Rockies.

That very afternoon the entire party set out for Denver. They had a good long journey ahead of them, but Young

Wild West was bound to lead them there in safety, and he did so.

Here the band of Rough Riders disbanded, Lancaster paying them off doubly what he had agreed to.

"I guess I'll settle here in the West," he said, as he parted with Wild. "Something new has come in my life. God bless you, Young Wild West. It was the luckiest day I ever had when I came to Weston to get you to organize the Rough Riders and show me what life in the Wild West was. May you always prosper and continue to be what you are now—the Prince of the Saddle and the Boss Boy of the Wild West!"

THE END.

Read "YOUNG WILD WEST'S DASH FOR LIFE; OR, A RIDE THAT SAVED A TOWN," which will be the next number (40) of "Wild West Weekly."

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